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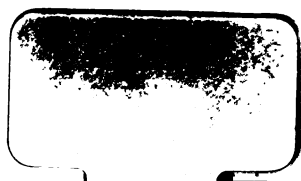
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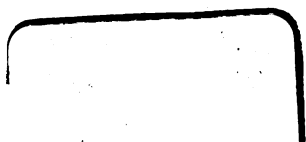


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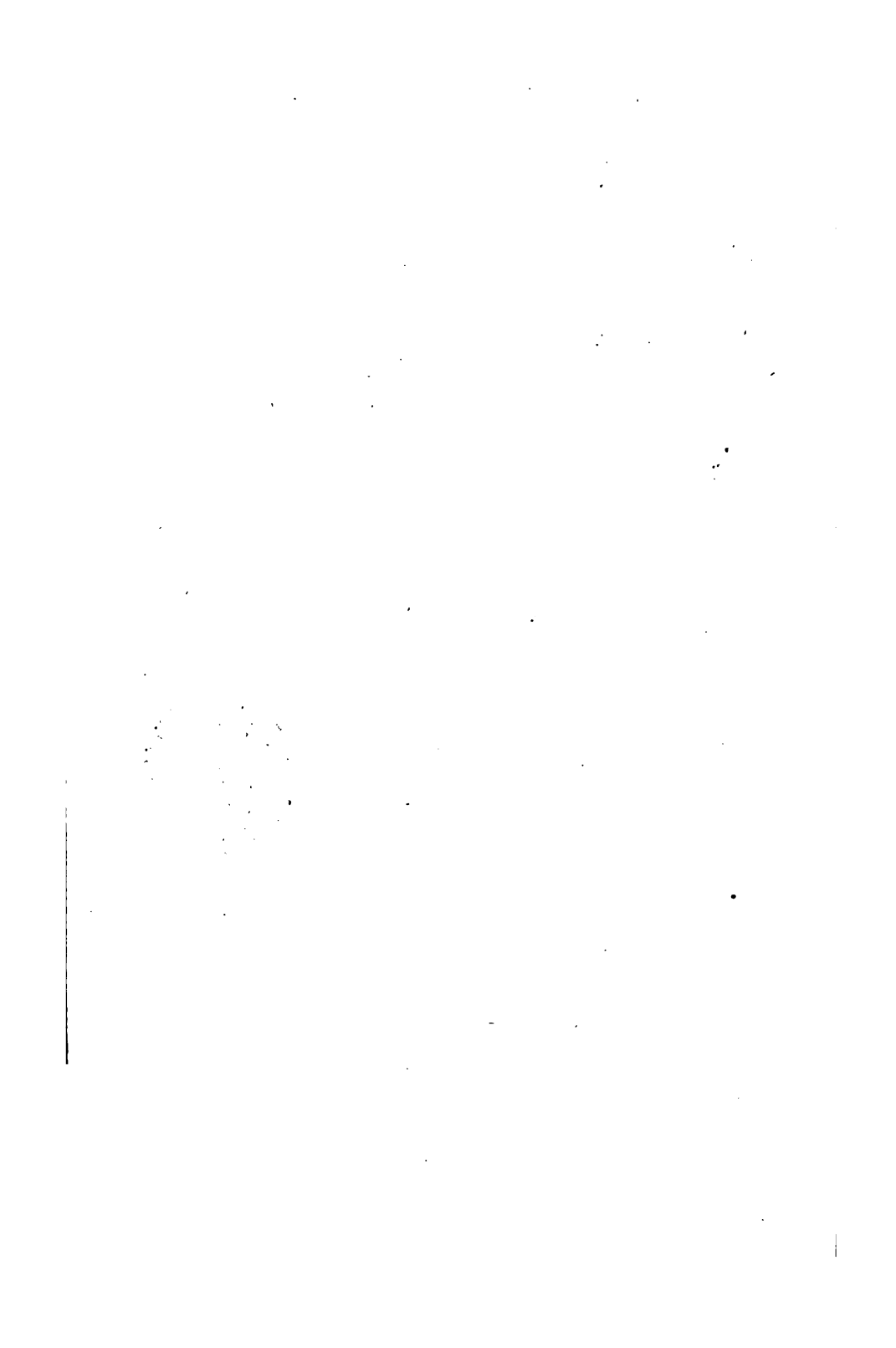


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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

VOL. I.



MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

A Novel.

BY LEGH KNIGHT,

AUTHOR OF "Tonic Bitters."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



SECOND EDITION.

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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

CHAPTER I.

"Sissie oughtn't to gallop Rufus so hard, ought she, mamma?"

"I think Sissie is bringing some good news, baby darling. See how the boys are running and waving their caps!"

Sissie's gallop soon brought her to the window, and in another minute she had jumped off Rufus and was beside her mother. "A foreign letter, mamma! A letter from papa!"

Mrs. Monk's pale face flushed crimson, and her hand shook as she broke the seal.

"Poor papa has been ill!" she exclaimed to the expectant children. "I think he is

coming home. Read it, Sissie," she added, after poring over the first page for a minute or two, with an expression of pain and anxiety on her face. "The words are all dancing before my eyes."

Sissie glanced quickly through the letter, and then said, "He is coming home very soon—in a week or two, I think. He writes from Malta, mamma. It is dated May 10th. He says, 'I should be with my darlings myself, instead of this letter, but that I am tied by the leg at present. I got an ugly kind of shot in my thigh, in the foolish affair with the Sikhs, and I have not been allowed to sit up for more than six weeks. I was too ill to write by the last mail. If all goes well, I hope to sail by the next, and to see all my treasures before another month is past. I am afraid this wound is a bad business, and will put me on the sick list for some time; but I shall have to thank it for giving me a peep at my wife and children,

after a five years' separation. Yes, Nel, my dearest, it was five years last Friday since I kissed you and your baby-boy, half an hour after his birth, and nearly got into sad trouble through having waited to see him. I suppose the rascal is quite a man now. And his brothers,—and my beautiful little girl,—I have hardly patience to lie here, when I think how soon I could be with you all. Shall I find my sweetest wife at all altered, or aged? I trust not. I found a grey hair just over my right temple two months ago. What do you say to that? Perhaps you will find I have grown an ugly old man. My doctor has caught me sitting up to write, and forbids another word. God bless my home treasures—my only treasures,—is the hourly prayer of their loving husband and father, Percy Monk.' ”

Sissie read to the end in a clear, firm tone, and returned the letter to her mother, without speaking. Mrs. Monk closed her

fingers tightly over the precious document, and then leant back and shut her eyes, as though the excitement had been a little too much for her.

"Mamma is tired," observed Edmund, the eldest boy. "Come along, Sissie, let's all go away, and leave her in peace."

"Edmund," said Sissie, passing her arm round her brother's neck, as they went out together, "Do you remember what I was like when papa left?"

"Yes, I think so. I think you were just like you are now?"

"I am not beautiful now, I know. Perhaps I never was, only he thought me so. I hope he won't be disappointed."

"Never fear, Sissie," cried Edmund, looking admiringly at his sister, "he won't be disappointed."

"Mamma is just as pretty as ever. I am sure she is not altered, or aged. And how pleased he will be with baby. Oh, Bertie,

don't take Rufus out again ! I galloped all the way from Bucksbridge. Let baby ride him into the stable."

The considerate Edmund, not liking to trust "baby" to Bertie and the pony, Sissie was left alone. She was not quite satisfied with Edmund's verdict on her looks, so she went up to her little room, and consulted her glass, with serious deliberation. Captain Monk must have been hard to please if he were likely to be disappointed by the picture which that honest referee presented to her view. The soft grey eyes which looked out from under their long, dark lashes, had an expression in which something of the reticence of dawning womanhood mingled with the frank directness of a child. Constant exposure to sun and wind had given a glow of life and health to the pure, fair skin, but it had not robbed the quickly varying colour of the least tinge of delicacy. The silky, light brown hair was brushed smoothly off

the clear open forehead, and fell in careless curls behind the tiny ear, in a fashion which, with Sissie, had nothing of affected simplicity, but was the most natural arrangement for a girl of fifteen, who was still regarded by herself and others as a child. A physiognomist would have seen refinement and quick sensibilities in the delicately formed nose, with the slightly outward curve of its narrow bridge; and in the trifling projection of the rounded chin he would have read an assurance of sufficient strength of will to carry out the dictates of the sensible brow and the honest eyes. The weak point of the face was the mouth. The jaw was too narrow, and the front teeth were so long, that a perceptible effort was necessary to make the short upper lip do its part towards covering them. Perhaps "beautiful" was a term which only a father or a lover would apply to Sissie. Strangers who met the tall, slight girl, riding to Bucksbridge on her red-

brown pony, or blackberrying with her little brothers along the Cover-heath hedges, would turn again and again to look at the pretty picture, and would go on their way feeling somehow the better and the happier for the sight. The few old family friends never thought about Sissie's pretty face. They loved to look at the face because it was Sissie's, not because it was pretty. And yet, being Sissie's, it seemed impossible that it should be otherwise than pretty.

This was not quite the conclusion which Sissie drew from her glass; but her scrutiny was not unsatisfactory. "I don't think papa will mind about it," she said to herself, as she turned away, "but I am certain I am not beautiful."

Not many girls of Sissie's age would have been so ignorant of their own advantages, or so altogether devoid of self-knowledge of every kind as Sissie was. A most exceptional training had helped to form a some-

what exceptional character. Two years before Sissie's birth, Percy Monk, with nothing of his own but his lieutenant's pay, and his not inconsiderable debts, had fascinated and married the daughter of an invalided captain in the navy, who, having never refused any wish of his only child, could not begin by refusing her the husband who had won her heart. So the captain paid the lieutenant's debts, and having a shrewd suspicion that his son-in-law was not to be trusted to provide for the future at the expense of the present, invested the remainder of his savings in a wilderness of young fir trees, warranted some day to be a valuable property. A dilapidated cottage was converted into a habitable dwelling, and the whole was settled on Mrs. Monk and her children. Here the kind old man passed the last twelve years of his life, happy with his daughter and her children; and here Sissie was born, and grew up without a suspicion

that fate was dealing hardly with her in strictly confining her within a radius of six miles round her home, away from which she had never slept, even for a single night. Till her sixth year she had rejoiced in the companionship of a twin sister, whose infantine beauty and engaging ways had completely eclipsed the less brilliant Sissie. Soon after Herbert's birth little Nellie had died, and from that time Sissie had had no playfellows but her brothers. Once or twice girls of her own age had been invited to the cottage for her behoof, but after a few shy courtesies, she had always fled with the boys to the remotest corner of their wilderness, and left her guests to be entertained by her mother. Latterly, all such attempts at providing her with suitable associates had been given up. There were no means, had there been room, for entertaining guests at the cottage, and Sissie stoutly resisted all solicitations to pay visits away from home.

At fifteen it was still, as it had been at five, beyond the power of her imagination to picture any place so charming as her home, or any scene more beautiful than what to other eyes was the dreary waste of Cover-heath. From this it will be seen that imagination was not Sissie's forte.

To Edmund, Cover-heath was not all the world. The boy's fancy wandered far away from his home, and he delighted to describe to Sissie, in glowing language, the wonders which were to be seen and done by them both when he should be a man. Together they had read, again and again, every book in their grandfather's well selected library, and while Sissie's three years' seniority and acknowledged good sense gave a weight to her decisions on all knotty points of history, and physical or moral science, Edmund's poetical instinct made him an oracle in all matters of taste and imagination. On wet days the two children would sit for hours

curled up on the floor of the half-furnished room where the books were kept, Sissie's arm thrown round Edmund's neck, and her fair curls overlying his waves of dark hair. At other times the books would be untouched for days, whilst the children were scouring the country with their pony, fishing in Black-wood lake, or clearing garden ground with spades and pickaxes. Of regular, conventional *education*, so called, there was very little. Mrs. Monk had acquired a schoolgirl's amount of musical skill, and her daughter, who had more taste and a better ear, had learnt from her to play and sing, with tolerable credit to herself and her teacher. There were French and Italian books in the library, so when the English favourites were getting a little flat through frequent perusal, dictionaries and grammars were put in requisition to unlock fresh stores of amusement. Here also Mrs. Monk could give a little help, and Sissie soon knew as

much French and Italian as most school-girls of her age. Knowledge of the world, also, was acquired from her mother, who, on her part, had acquired it at a boarding-school during her father's frequent voyages, and when he was on land, from the society of a seaport town. Limited as this experience was, it was experience of a much larger world than that of Bucksbridge, and a more substantial one than that which figured in Edmund's day-dreams. Still Sissie was most inclined to pin her faith in this matter on the authority of her silent friends in the book-room.

Long before she was fifteen, Sissie had unconsciously sounded all the depths of her mother's mind, and found that the deepest of them were but shallows, of which the bottom was reached before she had thrown out one quarter of her line. The child never guessed the meaning of her vague sense of disappointment, but she instinctively turned

elsewhere for the sympathy which her mother could not give. There was not one of Mrs. Monk's children—not even the five-year-old “baby”—who was not her superior in intellect and force of character. She had, however, two strong points,—she was a most devoted wife, and an excellent house-keeper. The second of these qualities was the result of the first. In the days before her marriage, no such capability had been perceptible. Captain Herbert had been quite satisfied with his daughter's pretty face and gentle manners. He would never have imposed any responsibility or care on one so fragile, and who reminded him so painfully of her dead mother. Besides a father's doating fondness for his only child, there was some cause for this indulgence in the but too natural fear that Nellie might have inherited the brain disease which had killed her mother, and her mother's mother—a disease to which every sort of excite-

ment was calculated to give a fatal impetus. So Nellie Herbert had never had an idea beyond her own amusement, and the care of her health, until the day when she had met with Percy Monk. Then everything was altered. An unlimited indulgence in novels of every description had prepared her for the hero who was to be "the arbiter of her destiny" or "the star of her life," but the hero had been slow in making his appearance, for Nellie had not sufficient imagination to clothe any of the middies of her acquaintance with heroic attributes. No imagination was needed to make a hero of Percy Monk. The light, elegant figure, the small, well-shaped hands and feet, the regular features, the melting brown eyes, the silky hair and moustache, the sweet, somewhat sad smile, were worthy even of "Thaddeus of Warsaw" himself. And then there was nothing in which the young lieutenant was not a proficient. He rode well, danced well,

sang well, painted well, read well, acted well, talked well, listened well. When all these perfections were displayed in the form of homage to herself, a rare humility took possession of Nellie. With her noble old father she had stood quite on an equality, and amongst her friends and acquaintances she had been as a little queen. But towards Percy Monk she would gladly have taken the position of a slave—to be his wife was an honour so overpowering as to be almost painful. Captain Herbert saw with other eyes. But any opposition to Nellie's wishes was not to be thought of—for was there not that terrible enemy ready to spring out at the slightest agitation? And the enemy did spring out at the joyful agitation of the wedding, and kept the poor fragile bride for hours at the point of death. He was vanquished, however, for the time, and when the anxious father had taken his prudent measures to secure a home for his

daughter, whatever might happen, and to secure for himself the opportunity of watching over her day and night, he became less uneasy. His fears were, however, re-awakened when he found how resolutely Mrs. Monk set herself to the management of the house, and with what never-ceasing vigilance she regulated the family expenditure. Captain Herbert saw well that this care was in order that Percy might not be curtailed in any little personal indulgence, and he felt a respect for his daughter which he had never felt before; but he trembled for the result of such a tax on the poor feeble brain. His own great love for his child—and later for her children,—threw a charm over his life at Cover-heath, which it would not otherwise have had, for Nellie had given all her heart to her husband,—she had no love left for the father who idolized her, nor for the children who, after her father's death, were for many years her only

companions. Her ill-health, too, and the indulgence consequent on it, had made her very irritable, and though her husband never saw anything but smiles on her face, her father and her children had much to suffer from undeserved reproaches, and un-availing complaints. The children learned from the father to be all gentleness and forbearance to "poor mamma;" but their love was given first to the grandfather, who was both father and mother to them, and after him, to the father of whom they had seen so little, but of whom their mother spoke with such rapturous affection. Between Sissie and her grandfather the closest friendship had existed. From a baby she had been the old man's constant companion, and she was never so happy as when in his arms, or toddling about with the help of his finger. As she grew older, their mutual confidences were unceasing. The child never tired of listening to the old sailor's

“yarns”—nor the old sailor to the child’s prattle. And there was an almost ludicrous, and yet touching likeness between the two, not only in face, but in turns of thought and expression. Sissie seemed to have nothing of her father, or her mother, either in her appearance or her character. She was a copy in miniature of the honest, simple-minded, large-hearted, keen-witted sailor grandfather. Her mother would have loved her better could she have traced anything of her father in the girl; and her father looked in vain for any likeness to her pretty, feeble-minded mother. When Percy Monk had laughingly declared that his little daughter had inherited even her grandfather’s quarter-deck walk, his wife had felt it almost as a reproach. But Monk himself was well-pleased at the likeness, for he had a warm affection and respect for his father-in-law, which he had shown by insisting that his eldest child, regardless of sex, should

bear that father-in-law's name. Even her husband's fancy could not reconcile Mrs. Monk to the name of Alexandrina, and gradually the unwieldy compliment to Alexander Herbert had given place to the pretty pet name of Sissie. Captain Monk had been more ready to let Alexandrina be laid aside when he had got another representative of the honoured name in his second son, Herbert, but Sissie was still often "Sandy" with her father. Her grandfather's death, when she was ten years old, was Sissie's first grief, and it had made so deep an impression on her that her face never afterwards lost a slightly pensive expression, nor her manners a gravity unsuited to her age.

The pensive expression was particularly marked when Sissie turned from the glass, which she had consulted as to the chances of her appearance being satisfactory to her father. Even to her eyes, as she scrutinized the reflection of her own features, the like-

ness to her grandfather was very striking, and it was this likeness which made her decide that her father would not mind if she were not pretty. Children are quick to see in what esteem those they love are held by others, and Sissie's strongest feeling of affection for the father of whom she knew so little, was prompted by the knowledge that he loved her grandfather. Her own likeness to that grandfather, of which she had so often been told, was to her a most precious heritage, and she had an inward conviction that her father would sympathise in this feeling, which she had never dared to hope that her mother could even understand. With her mind full of the dear memory her own features had conjured up, Sissie entered the darkened room in which her mother sat.

"Why have you left me so long alone, Sissie? You might try to cheer me a little after this news about—about your dear papa."

"But, mamma, isn't it cheering news? Are not you glad to think papa is coming home?"

"How can I hope that he is coming home? He owns that he has been very ill, and perhaps by this time he has had a relapse, and may be——" Mrs. Monk stopped suddenly, and put her hand to her head.

Sissie looked alarmed.

"Dear mamma," she said, "Don't torment yourself with such gloomy forebodings. Papa says he is much better, and I will bet you a new hen that he will be here in less than a fortnight."

"It is not ladylike to bet, Sissie. I am sure your papa would not like it. He is so particular. I am sure I don't know what he will think of your rough ways. You were a little girl when he left, but you are growing into a woman now, and that makes a great difference."

As Mrs. Monk looked at her critically,

with a very dissatisfied air, Sissie stood quite still, in a penitent attitude, as though she felt all the heinousness of her own unladylike ways. She did not attempt to interrupt her mother's reproaches, but an interruption came in the shape of a soft ball, which bounded in at the open window, and alighted on Mrs. Monk's head. Peals of laughter from without were echoed from within the room, for though Mrs. Monk's temper was not equable, it was not to be ruffled by a piece of childish fun. Sissie, however, stopped her laughter to walk out and capture the offender, whom she carried in struggling, to beg his mother's pardon. Most people would have been struck with the easy, natural grace of the girl's movements, as she held her little brother aloft in her arms, but Mrs. Monk exclaimed, "Oh dear, Sissie! You have just the old quarter-deck walk!"

Sissie turned crimson, and hastily put-

ting her little brother down, fled from the room. A few minutes later, Edmund, on his way to fish in Black-wood lake, caught sight of his sister through the trees, and, hurrying to the spot, found her clinging to a rugged old fir-tree, and sobbing out,—

“Oh, grandpapa, grandpapa!”

“Dearest Sissie, what *is* the matter?”

“Mamma has been scolding me for being like grandpapa! I wish I was so like him that no one would know the difference!

Here another voice joined in,—

“I shall tell papa that mamma bullies you, Sissie, and I know *he* won't stand it!” said Herbert, peeping round from behind another tree.

“Nonsense, Bertie!” answered Sissie; her generous nature at once repenting of having complained of her mother. “Of course mamma is right to scold me if I don't walk like a lady. I suppose a girl ought not to be like a sailor. But,

oh!" she added, sadly, "I do wish we were all like grandpapa!"

"I'll be a sailor, Sissie, and then I can be like him, every bit."

Herbert's mind always came round to this conclusion, "I'll be a sailor."

In the meantime Mrs. Monk had taken her youngest child on her knee, and gazing into his face, said, "Ah, baby darling! Let me look at your eyes. You have dear papa's very own eyes, my beautiful boy."

CHAPTER II.

IF poor Sissie's "unladylike" bet had been taken by her mother, she would have won the new hen, for it wanted two days of the fortnight when, at about ten o'clock one evening, the unusual sound of wheels was heard on the Cover-heath road. The two younger children were in bed, but Sissie and Edmund had been kept up by a strong feeling of expectation. Before daybreak that morning, a little white figure had been standing by Sissie's bed, and two eager brown eyes—looking out of a pale face, and an uncombed mass of dark hair—had met her eyes as they opened in sleepy wonder.

"Sissie, papa will come to-day."

"How do you know, Edmund?"

"Something tells me he will."

Sissie's confidence in this "something" was almost as undoubting as her brother's, and "something" was right. When the children heard the wheels, however, alarm for their mother left room for no other thought. Mrs. Monk's face flushed all over a deep purple, her eyes took a fixed, glassy look, and her mouth grew rigid. Sissie flew from the room, and when the sound told the anxious listeners that the approaching carriage had turned into the cottage drive, Edmund was chafing his mother's cold hands, and Sissie was forcing some drops between her clenched teeth. Reviving quickly under these remedies, Mrs. Monk exclaimed, "Why are you lingering here, Sissie? Tell me if it be he; this suspense will kill me!"

"Sissie was standing in the little porch

when the carriage stopped, and the most musical voice she had ever heard, cried out, "Is that my little Sandy?"

"Oh, papa, I *am* so glad!" and Sissie felt a great load fall off her mind as she was pressed closely, but very gently, to her father's heart.

"Your mother——?"

"I am here—Oh, my husband! my love! my life!"

"Nellie, my darling, be calm!" cried Captain Monk, in terror, as he felt that his wife had become a dead weight in his arms.

"Lay mamma down on the lawn, papa; it is quite dry. She will be better directly," and Sissie administered the drops again.

"I am better now. I am so sorry, Percy. Let us go in-doors now."

Mrs. Monk held her husband's arm tightly with one hand, whilst with the other she groped like a blind person. When they reached the drawing-room, she drew her

husband to the sofa, and sank down, with her head upon his shoulder. As he sat thus, his arm round his wife, and his soft brown eyes looking tenderly down on the suffering face, the children had an opportunity of filling in the outline which was all their memory had preserved of their father. They had not much time for this, however. In a few minutes Mrs. Monk raised her head feebly, without opening her eyes.

"Sissie, get papa some supper," she said.

"Never mind me, Sissie!" cried the captain; but Sissie and her brother had both left the room.

"Oh, Sissie; I love him *so* much!" exclaimed Edmund, catching his sister's hand, as they went together towards the kitchen.

Sissie was never so enthusiastic as Edmund, but she felt a glow at her heart as she thought of her father's kind eyes and sweet voice. She felt, though she did not analyse her own feelings, that she had now some

one who would understand *that* in her which made her something more than a child.

For the last twelve days Mrs. Monk had been expending the most anxious thought on having everything so arranged that her husband's first meal at home, at whatever time it might be called for, should be suitable to the fastidious taste which had always seemed to her one of Percy Monk's most heroic attributes. It was not long, therefore, before Sissie and old Phœbe, the one maid-servant of the establishment, had laid out an elegant little supper in the dining-room. When Sissie hurried into the room, to say that all was ready, her father was standing on the hearthrug, and his wife was sitting on the sofa, fondly regarding him.

"The old quarter-deck step, I see," observed Captain Monk, as his daughter entered the room.

Sissie flushed with anger, and was turning away, when the reproachful glance she cast at her father showed her that his eyes were full of tears, and that his lip trembled.

"Come here, Sissie," he said, quickly reading what was in the girl's mind. "I love your quarter-deck step, my little Sandy. You cannot be too like him whose name I gave you."

Sissie put both her arms round her father's neck—she was very nearly as tall as he—and kissed him earnestly and deliberately, first on one cheek, then on the other. Her heart was quite won now.

Captain Monk laughed a little at the solemnity of the caress, but he was so touched by his child's simple earnestness, that for a few moments he could not speak.

"And I have never even looked at my boy. Come here, Edmund. What do you think of your father?"—with the proud

conscious look of a man whose appearance has always caused him to be well thought of.

"I like my father very much," answered Edmund, as solemnly as Sissie had performed her salute.

Captain Monk laughed again, and exclaimed, "Our two eldest children are evidently characters, Nellie."

"It is all the fault of your books, Percy!" answered Mrs. Monk, in a tone of eager self-exculpation. "They have read nothing like other children—no fairy-tales, no novels——"

"They are better without," said the father, quickly. "And I am very glad that they are not ordinary mortals. Now let me see whether I like my son very much," laying his two hands on the boy's shoulders. "Why, Nellie," he exclaimed, after a minute's silence, "do you know of whom this boy is the reproduction?"

"Not of you—nor of me," answered Mrs. Monk, plaintively.

“Not of me, certainly, and, most certainly, not of you. He is every inch a Monk. He is the exact image of my grandmother, who, you know, was a Monk—the only daughter of Monk of Monk's Own. A great heiress, and a great beauty, Edmund. She might have been a duchess, but she chose to marry her first cousin, like myself, only a poor captain of foot. That branch of the family are all wonderfully alike, I believe, but I never knew of one of *our* branch having the presumption to adopt their looks. My grandmother's children were as unlike herself as possible. I remember her a splendid old lady. But it is her portrait at Monk's Own for which this boy might have sat. Supper, did you say, Sandy? Come along, then, my Nellie.”

“It is just eleven, children; you had better go to bed,” said Mrs. Monk, as she and her husband passed into the dining-room.

When, an hour later, Captain Monk

peeped into the nursery, he motioned his wife to take the candle away, whilst he enjoyed the moonlit picture. In one little white bed lay the two children whom he had not yet seen. Bertie's fair, childish face, with its chubby features and broad brow, was thrown well back on the pillow, full in the moonbeams, whilst Clement was nestling close to his brother, his arms clasped round his neck, his delicate profile, so like his father's, pressed against the other's cheek, and his ringlets of dark hair all twisted among Bertie's short light curls. On the other bed sat Edmund in his night-shirt, his pale face and large dark eyes looking weird in the moonlight, as he held forth in low eager tones to Sissie, who was standing in the window, in a white dressing-gown, with her brush in her hand, but too much absorbed in attending to Edmund to do anything but listen.

"Sissie, you ought to be in bed!" ex-

claimed Mrs. Monk, in an impatient whisper, and the pretty scene was broken up.

Sissie felt as though she were somehow a different person when she was awakened the next morning at daybreak, by a gentle tap at her window. In a minute she had softly opened the casement, and a large cat stepped demurely in, and expressed his thanks by a perfect paroxysm of purring and twisting about, each twist ending in the application of a cold damp nose to Sissie's bare feet. This little scene had been enacted every morning for the last seven years, Dick, who spent his nights in poaching, and such lawless practices, considering it his privilege, at the first streak of morning light, to climb up by the porch to his mistress's room, and take his luxurious repose upon her bed, whilst she prepared for the busy idleness of her happy day.

This morning she felt as if her life had become altogether different, and much

happier, since yesterday. And it had become different, but whether this difference would make it happier was rather doubtful. A feverish, restless element had been introduced into the formerly peaceful cottage. No one could be more kind and considerate, nor less censorious than Captain Monk, but there was an instinctive feeling which made his wife and children constantly ask themselves, "Will papa like this?" or "Will not papa disapprove of that?" He showed no tendency to self-assertion, and no love of power, yet there was in him an influence which made him the centre of whatever society he was in, which made it difficult, almost impossible, for others to assert their own individuality, or to have any will distinct from his. This characteristic was of course little perceptible with regard to the younger children, but Sissie, who had a great deal of individuality, was very conscious of it, and felt a sort of pride in her father's involuntary

ascendancy, even when, as was often the case, her judgment rebelled though her will consented. Such a case occurred on the second day after Captain Monk's return.

"Nellie, I am going to London to-day, will you come with me?"

"To London, Percy! I have not been to London for six years."

"All the more reason you should come now."

"Oh, I could not possibly. It would make me ill."

"Would it, darling? Would it, Sissie?"

"I do not know, papa. Perhaps it might. Mr. Saxton said mamma was never to be in a crowd, or to be hurried."

"Very well; then we will not risk it. At any rate *you* must come, Sissie."

"Oh, Sissie!" cried Edmund, in a rapture of delight at the idea.

"Papa, take Edmund. He would be so delighted."

"And you? Don't you wish to go?"

"Edmund would care more about it than I should."

"Edmund can come as well as you, Sandy; but I must have you. I want to get you a new outfit."

"An outfit, papa? What for?"

"What for? To be a creditable Miss Monk, instead of a nondescript half boy and half girl—half sailor and half mermaid."

Mrs. Monk looked inclined to cry, but Sissie laughed merrily, and the boys joined in the laugh.

"But what are you going to do with me, papa, to make me creditable?"

"I shall take you to a first-rate shop, and tell them to provide you with frocks and tippets, and everything else that you require."

"But the expense, Percy," objected Mrs. Monk, in a low, timid voice. Sissie looked

up quickly, first, at her mother, and then at her father.

"Oh, I am going to get some money," answered Captain Monk, carelessly. "I won't run into debt, Nellie, this time ; never fear !"

Mrs. Monk did not look quite satisfied, but she made no more opposition, and, after a minute's silence, said, "You will sleep in London, I suppose."

"Yes, if you won't be dull without us, I must take these children to see a play. I have been looking forward to that all the voyage home."

Edmund clapped his hands. "Oh, papa, what play ? May it be one of Shakspeare's plays ?"

"I don't know whether they are acting Shakspeare anywhere now. We know nothing in this desert. But what is Shakspeare to you, little man ?"

"Papa, do they ever act the Merchant of

Venice?" cried Edmund again—being of much too impetuous a character ever to answer a question.

"I don't know, my boy. As I said before, we know nothing here. We shall learn everything when we get to London. Now, Sissie! we must start at nine."

"How will you get to East Leighton, Percy? The cart would shake you too much."

"I have ordered a fly from Bucksbridge. I spoke to Andrews about it yesterday."

"You are sure you are running no risk in moving again so soon? You are still very lame."

"All the better for showing myself at the War Office. They will see I am not shamming sick. Don't worry yourself about me, my poor darling. Take care of yourself, and try to look a little less like a wisp of thistle-down when we come back to-morrow. Well, Sissie, in spite of the nondescript garments

and the quarter-deck walk, I have got a much prettier girl to show the great city than the great city ever showed to me."

"Are we going into the city, papa? Are we going to see Temple Bar?" cried Edmund.

"I did not mean the city literally, Edmund, but we will certainly see Temple Bar, if you wish it. I was thinking more of the west-end and the fashionable world."

"Will the 'fashionable world' think me something outlandish, papa, on account of my dress and my walk?"

"I shall not give them the chance, Sissie. You will be hidden from the public gaze till Madame Chose has made you presentable. I do not covet the distinction of being connected with a beautiful savage. Is Ayacarah one of your heroines, Edmund? But, I forget, you don't read novels."

"Who is Madame Chose, papa?" asked Sissie, gravely.

Captain Monk laughed.

"We have got to find that out, Sissie. I only know she is the best milliner in London."

Sissie looked appealingly at her mother, and when, in a few minutes, Captain Monk left the room, she asked, "Is there anything wrong in papa getting clothes for me, mamma?"

"Nothing your papa does can be wrong, Sissie," answered Mrs. Monk, with feeble severity. "But you must not let him be too generous. You must choose the cheapest things, and you must be contented with a few."

"Contented, mamma!" exclaimed Sissie. "I am quite contented with my old clothes, and I don't wish at all to go to London."

"You must not be ungrateful, Sissie. It is very kind of your papa to take you."

"I know it is, and I am glad we are going, for Edmund's sake."

Sissie felt conscious, however, that she deserved the reproach of ingratitude. She *could* not be glad, for her own sake. As she drove away from the cottage, sitting by her father's side in the Bucksbridge fly—in which she had last sat the day Captain Monk went to India,—she looked at all the familiar objects with a kind of remorseful fondness, as if she were going away for years, instead of for one night only. The girl's nature was so loyal that she felt as if it were a breach of the fealty due to her happy home to think of seeking pleasure in new scenes. Her mother's evident doubt as to the expediency of this trip was also a trouble to her conscience, and Captain Monk soon found that he must look to Edmund, and not to Sissie, for sympathy in his holiday-mood.

“There's Sissie's lover!” cried Edmund, as the fly stopped at East Leighton station.

"Sissie's lover!" echoed Captain Monk, with a laugh.

Sissie coloured, but said nothing till the tickets were taken, and they were on the platform, waiting for the train, when she laid her hand coaxingly on her father's arm, and begged, "Don't let us get into the same carriage with Mr. Warren."

There was something in Captain Monk's appearance and manner which always secured him special attention, and he had, therefore, little difficulty in contriving that he and his children should have a carriage to themselves.

"Now, Edmund, tell me about Sissie's lover," he said, as soon as they began to move out of the station.

"It is Mr. Warren, papa—that tall man, with the great black beard. He is awfully in love with Sissie, and she hates him."

"How is that, Sissie?"

"It is so stupid of him, papa; and he is so tiresome, and is always in the way."

"You are rather young to have a lover, Sandy."

"That's what makes it so stupid. It was three years ago that he began. Papa, I am sure mamma wrote to you all about it."

"Yes, now I remember she did. He asked if he might try to win your affections as you grew up. And, by-the-bye, he wrote to me, and I answered that I would not have you worried with anything of the sort till you were eighteen. Has he worried you since?"

"Not worried me, exactly. He has never said anything. But he is always everywhere, and he won't let me alone."

"Most girls of your age would be flattered at having such an admirer. He is not a bad-looking fellow."

"He is handsome, papa. I used to like him before he was so foolish. But was not it foolish of him to say that about me, when I was quite a child? How could he know

he should not change before I was grown up? And how could he know I should grow up at all like I was then?"

"Men in love don't think of such possibilities, Sissie."

"Then men in love are very stupid, papa," answered Sissie, positively.

There was something so childish in Sissie's way of treating this matter, that Captain Monk was as much surprised, as amused, at the womanly dignity with which she rejected Mr. Warren's proffered assistance at the London terminus, and having introduced her father, took the arm he offered, as she turned away from her crestfallen lover.

CHAPTER III.

MORNING in the early summer has such an all-powerful charm that it can give even to some parts of London a fresh and rural air. This is especially the case in the streets east of Hyde Park, into which a west wind carries so much of the country that the city is a hardly realized fact to the dwellers in those quaint, crooked thoroughfares, where an occasional torch-extinguisher still speaks of a past age, and the old-fashioned brick houses are made young and beautiful by their green drapery of clematis and Virginian creeper.

The cab which had brought Captain Monk and his children from the railway stopped

before the door of one of these old-fashioned, green-mantled houses, and Edmund exclaimed rapturously, "Oh, Sissie, look! That's how the link-boys used to put out their lights! Oh, papa, how jolly it is! It is just like having lived ever so long ago!"

"I thought London was much uglier than this, papa," remarked Sissie. "I did not think there would be any trees or flowers to be seen."

The inside of the house was in keeping with the outside. A solid foundation of that intense respectability which belongs to everything old-fashioned, was crowned by a superstructure of the lighter and more effective taste of the present day. Edmund, who was athirst for marvels, was disappointed in the first London house he had entered, whilst Sissie's instinctive sense of harmony was perfectly satisfied by all that she saw.

The children only knew that they were here to be introduced to "Miss Colquhoun," a very old friend of their father. Sissie had formed no idea of what Miss Colquhoun would be like, she was not given to such fanciful imaginings; but when she saw the mistress of the house, she felt that she was as exactly in keeping with her surroundings, as the surroundings were in keeping with one another. In fact, Miss Colquhoun's most striking characteristic cannot be better defined than by the saying—more expressive than elegant—that "she knew what was what." And, moreover, she always practised what she knew. In dress, manners, conduct, sentiment, principle, Miss Colquhoun never failed to find the exact pattern which was suited to every case and to every position in life; and in her own case she always most scrupulously adhered to the pattern she had laid down for her guidance. Abundance of wealth and influence had

enabled her throughout her life to follow unchecked the natural impulses of her order-loving character ; and the result of this long study of the fitness of things was that she was acknowledged by nearly the whole of a very large acquaintance to be not only a model, but an oracle in all matters of taste and conduct. For a single woman, who was no longer young, and who had never been beautiful, her influence was immense, and its cause was quite incomprehensible to those who could not appreciate the advantage of being guided by one who had seldom, if ever, been known to make a mistake. But, though there be some on whom common sense is thrown away, there are very few who are insensible to the charm of a ready wit and an easy manner, and these Miss Colquhoun possessed in an unusual degree. The young Monks, little as they had seen of society, were aware of the unusual perfection of their hostess's manner before she had

finished the words with which she welcomed them to her house.

"I thought it would not be long before I had this pleasure," she exclaimed, as she came forward, with extended hands, to meet Captain Monk; "but I hardly dared to hope that it would be so soon."

"Have I not always come to you the first thing after seeing my wife and bairns? And now I have brought you two of my bairns; and I hope you will admire them as much as I do."

"No one could do quite that, I fancy; but I assure you my eyesight is still very good, so you need not fear that I shall come much behind you. This is Alexandrina, of course, and this—this is Herbert?"

"Edmund," put in Captain Monk.

"How very stupid of me not at once to recognise my godson! But I always had a fancy that Edmund must be fair like his sister. You know it is not so *very* inexcus-

able in me to forget you"—turning to the boy—"considering that I have not seen you since you were two months old."

"*You* are not quite like my picture of you," remarked Edmund, fixing his solemn dark eyes on Miss Colquhoun.

"What picture have you of me, dear? Surely I was never weak enough to have my portrait taken!"

"Edmund does not mean a real portrait," explained Sissie.

"It is in my head," added Edmund, very seriously.

"Then you are disappointed in me?"

"No—not exactly disappointed: no, I am not at all disappointed."

"He is a strange boy," remarked Captain Monk, laughing at the judicial air with which his little son was regarding their hostess.

"Have you pictures in your head of all your friends, Edmund?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"All that I have never seen," answered Edmund.

"And those that you have seen—have you no pictures of them?"

"Sissie keeps those pictures; but there are not very many."

"Poor children! They have not seen above a dozen people in their lives, I fancy," exclaimed Captain Monk.

"Oh, yes, papa, more than that," cried Sissie, eagerly. "Many more than a dozen, are there not, Edmund?"

"Oh, yes; two dozen at least! Why, papa, there's you and mamma, and grandpapa, and Phoebe, and Andrews, and Mr. Warren, and Mr. and Mrs. Reid, and Mr. Saxton, and the Wilsons, and now there's Miss Colquhoun!"

"Well, you have not made out more than a dozen, Edmund—unless there are a dozen Wilsons. Do you think I am very wrong, Harriet, to bring my children up as semi-savages?"

"I do not think you have done so. But I am acting as a semi-savage in not giving you something to eat after your journey. Will you ring the bell, Edmund?"

"No, not now," said Captain Monk. "Perhaps you will kindly feed these children at your luncheon-time, whilst I go down to the War Office. And there is another kindness I want you to do for me. Will you take Sissie to your milliner, who is, of course, the best in London, and get her rigged out as a young lady ought to be?"

"She looks to me now very much like a young lady ought to be."

"You do not really mean that, Harriet. You merely say it to please us poor country folks."

"I think you might remember, Percy, that I never flatter."

"I do remember that you never used to flatter; but I thought you might have

acquired the habit since you have lived so much in London."

"Acquiring fresh habits is not my *forte*," answered Miss Colquhoun, rather dryly. After a short pause, she added, "Then you wish to have Sissie made as commonplace as a fashionable London belle?"

"I wish her not to be remarkable in any way. I must take them to see a play this evening, and I don't want the whole house to find out that we are a party of country bumpkins."

"And you will sleep here to-night?"

"If you will be troubled with us I shall be very glad to do so."

"You and I shall quarrel for the first time in our lives, Percy, if you pretend to think it possible that any Monk should be a trouble to me."

"I know no kindness is ever a trouble to you."

"And whilst you are at the War Office, I

will show the young people something of London, though I dare say Edmund has brighter pictures in his head than any I can show him."

"I need not go for half-an-hour yet," said Captain Monk, "and in the meantime we have an immense deal to talk of. I want to know all about ever so many old friends."

"And I want to know all about *one* old friend," returned Miss Colquhoun. "How did you manage to get wounded? And is your leg getting well as fast as it ought?"

Captain Monk had a large share of physical courage, and having consequently not that satisfaction in dwelling on past exploits and past sufferings which a man of a more pusillanimous temperament would have had, he made a very short story of the adventure which his wife's eager interest had already forced him to relate several times, and, as soon as possible, renewed his inquiries about mutual friends.

"And is old Sir John as vigorous as ever?" he asked.

"Quite as vigorous now. He seemed to be failing very fast a year or two ago; he had a slight paralytic seizure, but he has now entirely recovered from that, and, when I was there last Christmas, seemed more like a man of forty than of eighty."

"I must run down and see the old fellow. I always liked Sir John."

"He is just the same as ever—the most good-natured, warm-hearted despot that ever lived."

Captain Monk laughed. "There is no doubt of his despotism," he said. "Much as I like and esteem him, I have always been thankful that I had not the misfortune to be his son. What a tight rein he kept over those boys!"

"And still keeps over Rupert. Poor Rupert! I thought him very much changed when I was there. You know

what sad losses they have had in their family?"

"I heard of their eldest boy's death just before I left England. I should have gone down to see Rupert had I not been so pressed for time, and so unwilling to leave my wife till the last minute."

"They lost another boy last autumn, under somewhat similar circumstances; and since Christmas the baby has died—a boy also, and a very fine child. I am afraid Rupert will be quite broken down by this last blow."

"How many children have they left?"

"Three—all girls. The two eldest are growing almost out of childhood; Laura must be about the age of your Sissie. They are nice girls. Mrs. Rupert is an excellent mother."

"I like Mrs. Rupert. Sir John made a wise choice after all, though Rupert was not very ready to acknowledge it."

"He has acknowledged it with all his heart since. Rupert is a thoroughly devoted husband and father."

"I must say that we Monks have that merit, at any rate. Your mamma would not say I was a bad husband, would she, Sissie?"

"Mamma would say you were perfect in everything, papa. But that does not prove much, does it?" said Sissie, with rather an arch glance at her father.

"Then *you* do not think me a good husband, Sissie?"

"Yes I do, papa. But I think mamma's faith in you only proves that she is a good wife."

"You see the wilds of Cover-heath have turned out a female logician for me," remarked Captain Monk to Miss Colquhoun. "But you were telling me about Rupert."

"I think I have told you all there is to

tell. It is many years since you saw him, I suppose?"

"Ten or twelve, at least. He was abroad with his wife the last time I was in Yorkshire—that was a few months before the boy died. I saw all the children then, and I remember what a fine fellow I thought the next heir to Monk's Own."

"At present you are the next heir," said Miss Colquhoun.

"Are you sure Henry never married?" asked Captain Monk.

"How can you doubt it? There was never a suspicion of such a thing. And even if he had any motive for a secret marriage, it would certainly have been made public at the time of his death."

"Sir John's peculiar crotchets might have been motive enough for secrecy. Henry stood in terrible awe of his father."

"I grant that. But there remains the difficulty of the long-continued secrecy.

MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

ould you account for that? Henry
een dead more than ten years; and
surely his widow—if he left one—would
have brought forward her claims before
this.”

“Yes,” said Captain Monk, reflectively.
“It is hardly conceivable that she should
not have done so—especially if there were a
child.”

“What has put such an idea into your
head?” asked Miss Colquhoun. “A wife
and child appear to me utterly irreconcilable
with my impression of Henry Monk—or
Maurice, as he used to be called when we
were all playfellows together.”

“What was the motive for changing the
name?”

“Sir John always disliked it. The second
child was given his second name to please
his dying mother; it was the name of her
father, whom Sir John detested. The boy
was a great favourite with his mother’s

family, and consequently very much out of favour with his father. Sir John always said that he was a thorough Kirkpatrick, and had nothing of the Monks about him. After Mr. Kirkpatrick's death the objectionable name fell into disuse, and if you were to speak of Maurice Monk now, few people would know whom you meant."

"Rupert and I generally called him 'Harry,' I remember. I wonder Sir John allowed the name of Maurice to appear on his son's tombstone," observed Captain Monk.

"He may not have done so, perhaps."

"Yes, he did. At least, it was there six years ago; for I went to Yarmouth then, and saw poor Harry's grave. There were the two names conspicuously enough."

"How kind of you to visit his grave, Percy! You were never very great friends, were you?"

"It was hardly possible to be great friends

"All that I have never seen," answered Edmund.

"And those that you have seen—have you no pictures of them?"

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CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the children reached Cover-heath the next evening, it seemed to them that they had been away for months, instead of for thirty-six hours only. Sissie looked with delight over the monotonous level, with its wide straight roads, and its border of intense gloom where the Black-wood joined the young plantation which its scattered seeds had brought into existence. As the girl breathed the pure heath—and fir-scented air, and feasted her eyes on the free open landscape, bathed, as it then was, in the brightest moonlight, her heart swelled with joy and pride in her home. Edmund, on the contrary, saw no beauty in the scene

before him, for his eyes were still full of the gorgeous mimic scenes which had enchanted them the previous night; and his mind was too busy with the creations of human genius to have any thoughts to spare for the far greater creation which familiarity had rendered uninteresting.

"Mamma!" exclaimed the boy, bursting into the cottage directly the fly stopped, "it was 'Romeo and Juliet' that we saw, and it was all just like Shakspeare; and the moonlight *was* so beautiful!"

"You are none the worse, Percy?" asked Mrs. Monk, anxiously, as her husband limped into the narrow passage.

"Not a bit. And we have enjoyed ourselves famously. But we ought to have had you with us, my darling wife," kissing her tenderly.

"Mamma, isn't it silly of Sissie? She doesn't like Juliet because she fell in love so quickly, and told Romeo all about it.

People always do that, don't they? And I love Juliet. She was so beautiful, and I do so wish she hadn't died."

"This wise little girl of ours thought it all very childish," observed Captain Monk, as Sissie came into the room, after having been into the kitchen to see Phœbe.

"Do you mean the play, papa? I could not fancy it was real; and it is such nonsense to make mock moonlight. It would be much better if they did not attempt anything of the sort."

"You would like not to have any scenes, Sissie," said Captain Monk, "as they did in Shakspeare's time; only a printed board to say what the audience ought to see."

"Yes, I should like that much better. Then I should not keep thinking what a bad imitation it was, and I should be able to think more about the characters."

"But you don't like Juliet, Edmund says."

"No ; do you, papa ? She was so forward, and so false. What a shame it was to pretend she was going to do as her father wished, and then to cheat them all."

"People had not such strict ideas of honour in those days as they have now, Sissie. The acting of both Romeo and Juliet was excellent, Nellie. I wish you could have seen it. You thought the acting good, did not you, my severe little critic?"

"Yes," answered Sissie, eagerly. "Romeo and Juliet were both very well acted, and I liked all that exceedingly, the acting I mean. But the other people were very stupid, and did nothing naturally."

"Sissie ! how could you think about the acting ?" cried Edmund, half angrily. "You talk as if it had been like you and me acting Lord Bateman. It wasn't that a bit. It *was* Romeo and Juliet, and all those people. Look here, Herbert, I'll tell you all about it."

"And, in the meantime, Sissie and I will

have our supper," said Captain Monk, as Edmund began to repeat the play from the beginning, with the evident intention of going all through it. "Edmund has got another excitement besides Romeo and Juliet," added the Captain; "he has fallen in love with Miss Colquhoun."

"How is Miss Colquhoun?" asked Mrs. Monk, rather stiffly.

"Very well, and very kind. Was not she kind, Sissie?"

"Yes, very. Mamma, she quite understood about my dresses. I told her we could not afford anything grand; and she only got me a white muslin skirt to wear last night, and a nice grey poplin, which is being made for me. Neither of them is to cost much," Sissie hastened to add, as her mother gave a half-suppressed sigh. "Miss Colquhoun was very kind about that."

"Nevertheless, Sissie does not quite approve," said Captain Monk.

"I don't think Sissie ever quite approves of any one," observed Mrs. Monk.

"How did you know I did not like Miss Colquhoun, papa?"

"I saw it in your face, and I heard it in your voice."

"I *do* like her, papa. Her manner is very nice and kind, and she is a very comfortable person. But is she quite true? And doesn't she care a great deal about dress, and silly things?"

"I think she is thoroughly true at bottom, Sissie. But she is what is called a woman of the world, and the world has made her a little unnatural; not affected, she is much too well-bred for that."

"Unnatural is what I meant, papa. She didn't seem exactly to say what she thought, but what she thought she ought to say. I think she is a little like the stage moonlight."

"That's a capital simile, Sissie. But

there's a good deal of the genuine moonlight in Harriet Colquhoun, though I own there is some stage light on the surface. Nellie, these children of yours are too sharp for me; I am getting more and more afraid of them every day."

"There's Beppo!" cried Sissie, jumping up and opening the door to a large half-bred Spitz, who immediately began a series of frantic bounds, accompanied by loud rapturous barks.

"Sissie, don't let that dog make such a noise!" cried Mrs. Monk.

"Come, Beppo, my beauty, let's go and see Rufus;" and Sissie and her dog disappeared into the moonlight, followed by Herbert and Clement, whilst Edmund, cut short in the middle of his recital, was left to console himself with the original play, which he had fetched from the book-room.

"You look troubled and anxious, Nellie,"

said Captain Monk, drawing nearer to his wife. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing much, Percy, only—only——" Mrs. Monk strove hard to speak cheerfully, but her voice failed her, and the tears, which had evidently been flowing before, but had been resolutely kept back since her husband's return, again forced their way down her cheeks.

"Come, what is it, Nellie? You know you cannot now keep any troubles to yourself, as you can when I am away. Are these tears for filthy lucre's sake?"

"Percy, you know I never cared for money! But I don't know what we are to do now. I am so sorry to trouble you, darling—so soon after you have come home, too—but I really cannot see any way out of the difficulty."

"What is the difficulty, sweetheart? I daresay we can find a way out of it between us."

"It is that horrid man, Mitchell, who has been here again, threatening to summon you if his bill is not paid. Sissie has put him off time after time—he is always very civil to her—but he says he will not be put off again."

"Who is Mitchell?"

"He is the butcher at Bucksbridge. He has had no money for two or three years now. When his bill had got so large, I really was ashamed to offer him the trifling sum which was all I could spare at any time. You remember how it was about his bill, Percy?"

"Yes, my poor darling. I remember you let me have the money you had laid by for him, to stop the mouth of that scoundrelly Jew. Well, we must see if we can't raise the wind somehow. What is the amount due to this man?"

"I really have been afraid to look lately. He said something about two hundred

pounds, but I hope that was an exaggeration. I have done with as little meat as possible. We lived on rabbits for some time, till Edmund and Clement began to look so delicate, I was afraid we should have to swell Mr. Saxton's account; and besides, Mitchell thought we were dealing somewhere else, and became more clamorous than ever."

"Don't trouble yourself any more about him, Nellie. Dry your eyes, and smooth out those wrinkles, and I will settle Mitchell. Anything to save my pretty wife from getting old and careworn before her time."

"But, Percy, it is not Mitchell only. If he were to be paid, all the other tradespeople in Bucksbridge would send in their bills directly; and I don't see how it would be possible to settle with all, unless we were to sell this place, and we could never live so cheaply anywhere else."

"Better to sell my commission—if the worst comes to the worst—and then I could take Andrews's place, and save in that way."

"Oh, what a delight it would be to have you always here!" exclaimed Mrs. Monk, rapturously. "I could live happily on dry bread for that!"

"You don't look very fit to live on dry bread, my poor, fragile treasure. No, we must have good port wine and roast beef to put some colour into these pale cheeks." Captain Monk looked anxiously into his wife's face for a minute, and then rose and walked hastily across the little room.

"I had no idea it was as bad as this, Nellie," he said, passionately, having entirely laid aside the cheerful, careless tone which he had hitherto assumed. "Do you mean to say that all the time I have been away you have had to pinch, and struggle, and starve, like any poor camp-follower?"

"Only since poor papa's death. As long

as he was alive his pension kept us very comfortably."

Captain Monk winced, and took another rapid turn across the room.

"Your father has been dead five years," he said, in a husky voice, as he again approached his wife. "He died just after I left."

"His little legacies to the children paid Mitchell's bill then. Do you think it was wrong to take the money from the children? I thought it would be better for them in the end. And Sissie and Edmund were both most anxious it should be spent in that manner."

"Sissie and Edmund! They must have been mere infants then."

"Yes, they were very young. But they were obliged to know of all my difficulties, for Sissie had often to go and beg for longer credit. The tradespeople generally behaved better to her than to me."

Captain Monk groaned. "Why did I not know of all this, Nellie?" he asked, almost sternly.

"I could not bear to worry you. I did so wish that my letters should give you nothing but pleasure," answered Mrs. Monk, beginning to cry again, this time quite hysterically.

"For heaven's sake, don't do that, Nellie!" cried Captain Monk, in great alarm. "You will make yourself ill, my darling, and that will be worse than anything. Not all the butchers and bakers in the world are worth making yourself ill for, Nellie. Only compose yourself, my darling, and I *will* find some means to make it all straight. My commission shall go at once, and if it were not for the children, we could live quite happily in this wilderness; we have still one another, Nellie, if we have nothing else. Only look a little brighter, my dearest, whatever you do. You break my heart,

Nellie, when you cry. It makes me think what a selfish fellow I was to make you share my bad fortunes."

"You know that was not selfish, Percy," murmured Mrs. Monk, through her tears. "You know I would far rather starve with you than be a queen without you."

"It drives me mad to think that you should have so much to bear for my sake. And these poor children! Mitchell and Co. will swallow up all that should be spent on them! And what they might be if they had the advantages that other children have! Nellie, you and they have a great deal to forgive me!"

Though Captain Monk spoke now out of the fulness of his heart, and with no other purpose than to relieve his own excited feelings, he could not have chosen a better mode of restoring his wife's equanimity. Directly he showed signs of needing comfort, she became the comforter, and was

earnestly engaged in giving him the consolation which she had been unable to find for herself, when Sissie and Herbert re-entered the room.

"Here is a letter for you, papa," said Sissie; "which Andrews has just brought over from Bucksbridge. Mamma, Andrews brought a new churn, which he thought you would like; but if you don't like it, the East Leighton flyman says he will take it back, to save Andrews another journey to-morrow. He has to go by Bucksbridge."

"I can't have any new churn, Sissie," answered Mrs. Monk, rather fretfully. "Andrews should not——"

"The East Leighton fly not gone yet?" exclaimed Captain Monk, starting up from his letter with a pale face. "Stop him, then, Herbert; I must go back with him!"

"What is it, Percy?" asked Mrs. Monk, beginning to tremble, and growing paler than her husband.

Captain Monk at once repressed his own agitation to reassure his wife.

“Don’t be frightened, Nellie,” he said, putting his arm round her, and drawing her back to the seat from which she had hastily risen. “It is nothing—at least, it is a great deal, and very sad, but nothing to alarm you. It is about my poor cousins. I must go to Monk’s Own at once. There is no date to the letter. Look here;” and he placed in her hands the short note he had received. “Sissie, will you ask Phoebe to put together a few necessary things for me. I shall not, I hope, be away so much as a week, but I must go at once. Very shocking, is it not, Nellie? Poor fellow! Harriet Colquhoun was telling me all about them yesterday. If I had waited at her house to see the ‘Times’ this morning, I dare say I should have known of this before leaving town.”

“What piece of luggage will you take,

papa?" asked Sissie, looking in at the door.

"The little portmanteau I took to London. It will do just as it is, if Phœbe will put a dozen clean shirts into it, and my writing-case. Edmund, ask the flyman if he can get to East Leighton in time for the 10·30 up train. If he can I will start this minute. Herbert, my boy, fetch my railway-rug from the dressing-room. Don't be down-hearted, Nellie. I will be back as soon as I possibly can. I suppose that note is from one of his poor little girls. Harriet says the eldest is about Sissie's age."

"If he starts at once, he can do it, papa. He is at the door."

"Then good-bye, my Nell. I will write when I reach London, and again from York. What! ready, Sissie? That's right. Good-bye, my darlings all. Out with it, boys. No, don't come to the door, Nellie; the wind is a little chilly to-night. Take care

of your mother, Sissie, and write to me very often. Now then, coachman!" And the next minute the wheels were heard rolling rapidly away.

"What is it, mamma?" asked Sissie, as she returned to her mother, after watching the fly till it was out of sight.

"You can see," answered Mrs. Monk, pointing to the open note, which lay on the sofa. Sissie read:

"MY DEAR COUSIN PERCY,

"Mamma wishes me to tell you that poor grandpapa is ~~very~~ ill indeed. My dear papa was thrown from his horse while out hunting this morning, and he was killed. You are our nearest relation, so will you come to us, if you possibly can, mamma says. Grandpapa has not spoken since it happened. He had a fit. Do come.

"Your affectionate little cousin,

LUCY MONK."

This was written in a weak, childish hand.

Sissie stood looking at the letter long after she had finished reading it. She was thinking over all that Miss Colquhoun had said of the afflictions which had befallen this family, and of the poor father's deep mourning for his children. Now the children that were left were mourning for him. Sissie thought she should like to know these distant cousins, who had suffered so much, but it was not likely that they would ever come to Cover-heath,—indeed, it was hardly to be desired that they should, for how would it be possible to give them any of the comforts to which they were accustomed in their luxurious home. Whilst Sissie was meditating thus, with the open letter still in her hand, Edmund came up, and read it over her arm.

“Then I *shall* be Monk of Monk's Own!” he exclaimed, in great excitement, when at

one glance his quick brain had seized on all that lay beneath his poor little cousin's sad announcement.

"Nonsense, Edmund," said Mrs. Monk, angrily.

"Miss Colquhoun said so, mamma."

"That is impossible. Your papa always told me he had not a chance of ever having Monk's Own. And how could you have a better chance than he has, when the property is entailed?"

"Not a better chance, mamma. Of course papa would have it first. But Miss Colquhoun said I should be Monk of Monk's Own if Cousin Rupert died. It is Cousin Rupert that this letter talks about, isn't it, Sissie?"

"His children would come first, and then——"

"But girls can't have property, mamma, and he has not anything but girls."

"There you are wrong, Edmund. I am

sure that the Rupert Monks have several sons."

"No, mamma, Edmund is right," put in Sissie; "they have lost three boys, and now they have only girls. There are three girls. The eldest is my age. Lucy is not the eldest; Miss Colquhoun said Laura."

"Then isn't it so, mamma? If her grandpapa dies——"

"Edmund, you are perfectly disgusting!" exclaimed Sissie, indignantly. "I do believe you are wishing the poor old man to die. I never thought you could be so greedy!"

"It isn't greediness, Sissie. I don't want their money. But I should so like to live at Monk's Own, and for us to be *the* Monks, and then I could go everywhere, and see everything. And the books there would fill this house twice over. Papa told me so."

"You had better not set your heart on anything of that sort, Edmund," said Mrs.

Monk. "You will never have your wish. Why, even if the Rupert Monks have no boy left, there was another brother, and I daresay he has plenty of sons."

"No, mamma, he hasn't, because he's dead, and——"

"Miss Colquhoun says he did not marry, mamma," added Sissie.

"Then Miss Colquhoun is quite wrong, for I know he was married. He wrote about it to your papa, and, now I remember, he said then that he had a son. He may have many more now, for that was when you were a baby, Edmund."

"He died, mamma," said Sissie, in a low voice. "I don't know how; but Miss Colquhoun said his death was very sudden, and that he died ten years ago. Papa has seen his grave; it is at Yarmouth."

"Well, at any rate, he left one son, if not more. I remember his letter to your papa as well as possible."

"Papa did not say anything about it to Miss Colquhoun."

"It was a secret. I know he said no one was to be told. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it. But it cannot signify now the old man is dead, or dying. It was for fear of Sir John being angry that he wanted it kept secret."

"Why should Sir John have been angry, mamma?" asked Sissie.

"I don't know at all. But I know both the sons were very much afraid of their father! This poor Rupert was obliged to marry to please his father, instead of himself. And Sir John has never forgiven your papa because he did not ask his leave to marry me."

"Cousin Rupert is very fond of his wife now—he was very fond of her, I mean," said Sissie.

"Very likely. He was a good sort of man, and very handsome. I only saw him once. Now to bed, children."

CHAPTER V.

INSTEAD of less than a week, it was more than a month before Captain Monk returned to Cover-heath. Sir John had remained in a state of helpless unconsciousness for a fortnight, during which time there was so little change in him, either for better or for worse, that the medical men found it impossible to say whether or not it was likely that his magnificent constitution would recover from this attack, as it had done from the previous one. At the end of a fortnight, however, another seizure decided the question, and in a week the old man died. During all this time—first of doubt, and then of hopeless

waiting for the end—the presence of Captain Monk, as the only male representative of the family, was quite indispensable at Monk's Own; and even Mrs. Monk, much as she pined for his return, could not but admit that its delay was unavoidable. When he did at last come, it was almost as great an excitement as his return from India had been. Captain Monk himself, however, was very different to what he had been then. The scenes of suffering through which he had passed had evidently painfully affected his spirits, and he seemed more disposed to indulge his own sad thoughts than to answer the questions or join in the talk of his wife and children. Edmund listened in vain for any news about the succession to Monk's Own, until—more than an hour after her husband's arrival—Mrs. Monk asked timidly, “What will be done with Monk's Own? Where is the next heir?”

“Here,” answered Captain Monk, turning

very white, as he glanced hastily in his wife's face.

"Here! you don't mean that——" Mrs. Monk stopped, unable to frame the question she wished to put.

"I am the next heir," said Captain Monk, looking intently at a ring which had been one of Sir John's legacies to him.

"How is that possible, Percy? you——"

"There is no one else. All poor Rupert's sons are dead."

"I knew it was so!" exclaimed Edmund, joyfully. "I told you so, mamma! I knew papa was the next heir."

"But the other brother," faltered Mrs. Monk. "Is his son dead too?"

"It seems that was all a mistake," muttered Captain Monk, still examining his ring. "I will tell you about that presently"—with a meaning look towards the children. Then, raising his head, and speaking with more assurance, he added, "All the family

are confident that Henry never married ; and, in fact, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt that they are right."

"Shall we go to live at Monk's' Own, papa?" asked Edmund.

"Yes, my boy. The sooner the better, on many accounts."

"Leave Cover-heath!" exclaimed Sissie, with a face of dismay.

"Why, of course, Sissie," said Edmund, grandly. "Do you think Monk of Monk's Own could live anywhere but at Monk's Own? Papa is Monk of Monk's Own now."

"Percy, shall we be rich? can we pay the bills?" asked Mrs. Monk, clasping her two hands over her husband's arm, and gazing eagerly into his face.

"Look here," answered Captain Monk, drawing a cheque-book from his pocket. "I can write you cheques for any sums you please. I called at Whiston's on my way through town, and, though the necessary

legal forms have not been gone through yet, they have given me leave to draw on them to any reasonable amount. Poor old Sir John left a large balance in their hands. Give me a pen and ink, Sissie. Now, then, 200*l.* for the butcher—what's his name? You are sure it is not more than—— Good heavens, Nellie, how pale you are! My God, she has fainted! Run, Sissie!—call Phœbe!—send for Saxton!—get some brandy!”

“Carry mamma to the window, papa. I will get her drops. She will be better directly. She must not have brandy,” answered Sissie, calmly.

“How foolish of me!” were Mrs. Monk's first words on recovering. “I wonder what Mitchell would think if he knew that the idea of paying his bill made me faint. I am quite well now, Percy; don't look so grave and anxious.”

“We must get you to bed, my darling. You have been overdone to-day.”

"I do not feel tired. I never do when you are here. Children, it is very late for you to be up."

"Good-night, Sir Percy Monk, of Monk's Own," said Edmund, with a bombastic air.

"Sir Percy!" echoed Mrs. Monk. "Are you really Sir Percy now?"

"Yes, Lady Monk, I really am."

"Sir Percy Monk sounds very well," said Mrs. Monk, looking at her husband with glistening eyes.

"Shall you not be Captain any longer, papa?" asked Sissie, with the same expression of dismay as when she heard of the intended removal from Cover-heath.

"I shall still be Captain, Sissie, but the bigger rank swallows up the lesser."

"I think Captain is the bigger rank, papa, for you won that for yourself; but the other you have only got through other people's misfortunes."

"What do you mean, Sissie?" asked the

new baronet, so hastily, and almost angrily, that Sissie looked at him in startled surprise.

"You would not have been the next heir, should you, papa, if poor cousin Rupert's little boys had lived?" she asked, timidly.

"No, no, of course not," answered her father, in a tone of relief. "I did not know what you meant."

"It is much better for papa to be Monk of Monk's Own than for a little boy," said Edmund, with the ludicrously grand manner that he had assumed ever since the idea of being the future baronet had entered his head.

"You talk very glibly about Monk of Monk's Own, Edmund," said his father; "but can you tell me the origin of the name?"

"Of the name Monk, papa? I suppose it came from a monk, didn't it?"

"I don't know anything about that. I never had the curiosity to go into the question. I am speaking now of the origin

of Monk's Own. Do you know anything about that?"

"No, papa; doesn't it mean Monk's property?"

"Yes; but Monk's Own was a very small property indeed when the name was given. The Sir Rupert Monk of Charles the First's time was a devoted royalist. He had very large estates in the North Riding, but one after one they all went, till at the Restoration he had nothing left but an old tower on the north slope of the East Moorlands. Having nothing to live on, he was forced to become a hanger-on of the court, until such time as the king should find it convenient to fulfil his repeated promises of indemnifying the zealous cavalier for at least a portion of all that he had spent in his own and his father's cause. Sir Rupert was no courtier, and the court soon grew hateful to him. He was a staunch Protestant, and he saw with horror the king's

evident leaning towards Popery. At last, in weariness and disgust—weariness at waiting for justice which never came, disgust with the king whom he had helped to set on the throne—he suddenly abandoned the court, and retired for the rest of his life to his old tower, to which he gave the name of Monk's Own, explaining, in a letter to a friend, which has been preserved in our family archives (and a queer document it is), that, when the king is an Englishman and a gentleman, every English gentleman holds his lands, as well as his sword, only for the king; but when the king becomes a papist and a mountebank, every man must hold for himself all that he can call his own. And he made good his words when on one occasion Charles the Second paid a visit of curiosity to his dreary tower, of which strange tales were told at court. The old man, then nearly eighty, met the king outside the threshold, and, standing uncovered, but

immovably barring the entrance, said, 'May it please your gracious majesty, all my other good lands are freely at your service, but, sire, *this* is Monk's Own.' Even Charles had the grace to retire crestfallen after that rebuke. So you see, Edmund, we have a better right than you knew of to be proud of Monk's Own."

Edmund's eyes sparkled with a purer light than had shone in them of late. He was silent.

"What did the poor old man live upon, papa?" asked Sissie.

"He starved upon the scanty pittance which his son could spare out of his pay as a soldier of fortune. This son had early seen what a losing game loyalty was, and he had sold his sword, instead of giving away his lands with his sword, as his father had done. *His* son retrieved the fortunes of the family, having got into high favour with William of Orange, who reconverted the

barren old tower into the centre of a fruitful estate."

"Is the old tower still there, papa?" asked Edmund, humbly.

"Yes; it makes a very fine object from the windows, and, to my mind, is worth all the rest of the property."

Mrs. Monk asked no more questions about Henry Monk, but as her husband was getting into bed that night, he said, "I did not wish to speak before the children, Nellie, but it is quite clear that Henry was never married. Amongst Sir John's papers I found a letter from Rupert written from Yarmouth soon after Henry's death—which, you know, took place quite suddenly, from heart-disease, some time before Rupert had heard of it. Rupert, after giving all the particulars he could collect as to his brother's end, writes somewhat in these words: 'The clergyman tells me that there was a lady with poor Henry at the time; but the house

in which he lodged is now empty, the people have left the town, and the doctor who attended him has gone abroad. The lady has disappeared, and I can find no trace of her. If there really were such a person, and if she had any claim upon us, she would certainly have brought it forward before this. I am inclined to think the good clergyman was confusing the case with some other.' As a note to this Sir John had written, '*I am inclined to think the contrary. But doubtless the woman had no claim. Did I drive him to this?*' I believe, Nellie, that Sir John was right, and that Henry's letter to me was only one of the wild, half-bitter jests of which he was so fond. It is impossible that a secret marriage should have remained secret all these years. Don't you think so?"

"I don't feel sure about it, Percy. Can you refer to the letter? What I remember of it was so very earnest, and seemed so genuine."

"I never knew you so unreasonable

Nellie; the idea is simply preposterous," said the Captain, in such a different tone to his usual tender consideration, that Mrs. Monk was effectually silenced.

All was now confusion in the cottage. Captain Monk wished to remove his family into Yorkshire as soon as possible; but he was anxious that all traces of their former poverty should have disappeared before their arrival at Monk's Own. The draper at Bucksbridge—who for the last year or two had been growing very low-spirited about his "little bill"—was thrown into a state of unbounded excitement, not only by the sudden dissipation of his fears on that score, but by a magnificent order, which called forth all the resources of his establishment, for an entire outfit and suitable mourning for each member of the family. "So much the gentleman, to give *me* the order, instead of having the things from Lunnion, like so many of the gents hereabouts," remarked

the good man to his wife, oblivious of the fact that it was not many weeks since he had decided, "That 'ere Cap'en ain't no gentleman." The Captain *was* a gentleman, and therefore no sudden change of fortune could make him forget that it was more suitable for his family to enter into their new position in country-made clothes than in the newest London fashions. So the cottage was filled with dressmakers and tailors, and Sissie galloped about the country settling accounts, giving orders, and paying farewell visits.

Poor Sissie! She carried a very heavy heart about with her on her pony. The congratulations which poured in upon the family met with little response from the feelings of any of them, with the exception of Edmund and Clement. Edmund was wild with delight, and for the first time in their lives he and Sissie had no sympathy with each other. Herbert said he didn't "see the

fun of going to this new place," and he thought it "great rot to leave Cover-heath," where they had "all been so awfully jolly;" but he was too young to have any understanding of his sister's misery during these strange, busy days—when all the familiar scenes were beginning to grow unfamiliar in the altered light of the coming parting. Captain Monk was much in London at this time. When at home he was abstracted, and rather irritable, so that the children became a little afraid of the father, who had formerly been their ideal of an indulgent friend; and Mrs. Monk began to wish that Monk's Own had never been heard of—"if Mitchell's bill could have been settled in any other way," she added, in her own mind, remembering all the anxiety from which she was now relieved. Sissie had never felt the pressure of this anxiety. An unpaid butcher's bill does not weigh very heavily on a healthy girl of

fifteen, who has plenty of outdoor exercise. But parting from the home in which these fifteen years have passed is a grief which it seems almost beyond the power of fifteen to bear. Sissie would not for the world have let any one see the tears she shed, and only old Phoebe knew, by her stained pillow, that she cried herself to sleep every night. She was away—alone with Rufus and Beppo—nearly all day; and if, on her return, any one noticed her sad face and swollen eyes, they attributed them to fatigue and exposure to the weather in her long, wild gallops. When, night after night, she reached home in the dark, Mrs. Monk scolded, and talked of cold and propriety; but no one had seen the girl in the twilight, sitting on her grandfather's grave in Bucksbridge churchyard, with her dog at her feet scanning her sorrowful face with his soft brown eyes, and her pony contentedly grazing in an adjoining field.

In one of these late visits to Bucksbridge

churchyard Sissie met Mr. Warren, just as she was about to mount Rufus.

"You are very late out here, Miss Sissie," the young man said.

"I have been in the churchyard," answered Sissie, gravely; and Mr. Warren, who, with all the rest of the neighbourhood, had loved the gentle old man who was buried there, immediately looked grave likewise, and was so anxious not to obtrude on Sissie's mournful thoughts, that he missed the opportunity of helping her on to her pony, and only recovered his speech when she had sprung into the saddle, and had drawn up the reins ready for the gallop home. Then he spoke, laying his hand upon the pony's neck.

"So you are going away to be a grand lady, Sissie. You will soon forget Cover-heath, I suppose."

"I shall never forget Cover-heath," answered Sissie, passionately: "I shall never be so happy anywhere else!"

"Do you really mean that?" asked the lover, eagerly. "Won't you stay then, Sissie?"

"How can I?" cried Sissie, in a tone of joyful surprise. "Oh, Mr. Warren, I should so like to stay!"

"Will you stay with me, Sissie?"—very tenderly.

"With you?" repeated Sissie, innocently, not at once seeing the drift of the question. Then, catching Mr. Warren's eye, she coloured violently and said, "I couldn't stay with you."

"As my wife, dearest Sissie," whispered the young man, leaning towards her.

Sissie drew back indignantly, and fixing her eyes full on her wooer's face, said: "How very silly that is, Mr. Warren! I am not going to be any one's wife for ever so many years!"

"And if I were to wait ever so many years, Sissie?"

"I don't think I could be your wife then."

"Don't you love me at all, Sissie?"

"I don't know what you mean about loving you. I like you pretty well. Not so much as papa, or mamma, or the boys, or Phœbe, or Rufus—or you, my darling," to Beppo, who jumped up, as if to claim his share in the liking.

"That is very cruel of you, Sissie."

"Why should I say what isn't true? I can't pretend to like you so very much, and I shall not like you at all if you will talk in this foolish way to me. I don't want to be unkind," she added, looking into the young man's dejected face; "I should not like to be unkind to any one belonging to Cover-heath."

"You love Cover-heath better than you love me, Sissie?"

"Yes, of course I do. Will you let Rufus go, Mr. Warren? Good-night, and good-bye."

Sissie gave a jerk to the reins; Rufus sprang off like a deer, and Mr. Warren was left standing disconsolately by the stile. Sissie felt not the least compunction about him. Her heart was aching at the thought of leaving her grandfather's grave, and all the inanimate objects around which her girlish affections had entwined themselves; but she had not a particle of regret to spare for the admirer who, whilst she was yet a child, had done her an honour of which a woman might have been proud. "Certainly, the man is out of his senses, Beppo," she said to her dog, as he bounded along by her side.

Fifteen has very little mercy for sentimental weaknesses, and weakness of any kind was not likely to meet with much tolerance from Sissie, whose strength of character was strikingly displayed at this time—as it had been in all the previous trials of her short life. Her pillow and her grandfather's grave

had received all the tears she allowed herself to shed. When the final day of parting came, and the cottage was left in charge of Andrews and his wife, there was not a tear in Sissie's eyes as she took her place for the last time in the Bucksbridge fly; but the few poor neighbours who stood bowing in the road, as well as the Bucksbridge tradespeople who came out of their shop-doors, saw such a set, stern face, that they agreed, with considerable disapprobation, that "Miss Sissie had already grown proud and distant, now she was a fine lady."

CHAPTER VI.

It was Saturday night when the party reached Monk's Own. They had spent four days on the journey from Cover-heath, in order to spare Mrs. Monk as much as possible. A close carriage and a waggonette were ready for them at the station—seven miles from Monk's Own; and, late as it was when they arrived, there were many foot-passengers waiting about along the road, to get a peep at the “new family.” No regrets for Cover-heath could prevent Sissie from enjoying the drive over the wild moorland, with a keen, salt-laden wind, fresh from the North Sea, blowing full in her face. It was very ungrateful, she thought,

but she could not be quite miserable in such a country as this. Edmund was wildly excited. His questions about Monk's Own came so rapidly one after another that the poor coachman found it a hopeless task to give answers to them all—as hopeless as the children found it to understand the answers that he did give. This little practical difficulty was no check to Edmund's tongue; and, sometimes on the box, sometimes inside the waggonette, sometimes walking up hill, sometimes running down hill—he never ceased to chatter until they came within sight of Monk's Own. Then he was silent for a few minutes, eagerly taking in all he saw. At length, as they drove slowly up a long, steep hill, towards the house, the outline of a high tower was visible against the dull evening sky. “There's Sir Rupert's tower!” cried Edmund. “Let us go there first, Sissie!” And, without waiting for the coachman to stop, the three children

jumped out behind, and ran towards the black object which so interested them. It was farther off than they expected, and could only be reached, by the way they had chosen, through a great deal of very rough and swampy ground; so that by the time they had paid their tribute to Sir Rupert's memory, and returned to the house, Sissie and her brothers presented a sorry appearance in the eyes of the bevy of trim servants who were drawn up to receive their new master and mistress. Old Phœbe was sadly distressed at this disregard of the proprieties, and when she went to take away Sissie's candle that night, thought it necessary to administer a scolding, which wound up with these words: "I am sure, miss, I hope you will try and look like other young ladies in church to-morrow, and not forget that your papa is a somebody now." Sissie promised, but whether or not she forgot that her father was "a somebody," she certainly

forgot Phœbe's admonition, and arrived in church, just as the service began, with her skirts wet with sea-water, her hat torn, and her hair dishevelled and out of curl. She had done her best, poor child! to make herself tidy before entering—out of respect for the church, not for the congregation—but there had been no other alternative than to *go in* as she was, or not to *go in* at all, for she and Edmund, having started off very early to see the sea—of which they had caught tantalizing glimpses on their journey northward—had been so engrossed with the wonders of the shore, that they had forgotten everything else, until the sound of the church bells reached them across the hills from Monk's Kirk, half-a-mile off, and reminded them of the service which they were bound to attend. Going first to Monk's Own, two miles farther, was out of the question. So poor old Phœbe had again to blush for her young mistress, whilst others who caught

sight of the fair girl, with her heightened colour, glistening eyes, and slightly bashful air, thought they had seldom seen a prettier face than that of the new baronet's daughter.

Sissie was quite unconscious of being an object of remark. She caught Phoebe's eye, and knew she should be scolded for getting wet, which brought a still more becoming colour into her face; but, after that, she thought no more about herself. All thoughts which would wander from the service were given to the widow and her three young daughters, who occupied the next pew to that appropriated to the head of the Monk family. None of the faces were visible to Sissie, excepting that of the youngest, a pretty child of ten, who kept glancing eagerly round, to see what her new cousins were like.

To Sissie's mind, also, a deep and solemn interest attached to the memorial tablets

which were placed over the two pews. Over the heads of the Monk's Own family was an elaborate monument in black and white marble, to the memory of Lady Monk, who died in 1807, and of "Henry Monk, second son of Sir John Monk, of Monk's Own, who died August 25th, 1837. Aged 30."

Underneath the more pretentious monument was a plain tablet to the memory of Sir John himself.

Over the adjoining pew were inscriptions to the memory of "Harry Walter, aged six years;" "John Rupert, aged five years;" and "Wilfred, aged ten months;" the children of Rupert and Maria Monk; and, again, beneath these names, came the newly-erected tablet to the memory of "Rupert, eldest son of Sir John Monk, of Monk's Own, who was born August 20th, 1805, and was killed by a fall from his horse, July 2nd, 1850."

These six lives had passed away in thirteen years, and now her father had stepped into their place. Sissie had an undefined feeling of compunction towards the four black forms sitting under the records of all that they had lost. She was roused from these meditations by the words of the text—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." Sissie knew that the Rector of Monk's Kirk was Mrs. Rupert Monk's father, and that she and her children had gone to live with him. These words, which Dr. Bligh had chosen, had a peculiar significance just now, and there was a general air of suppressed excitement visible throughout the church as he began his sermon. Those who expected personalities were, however, disappointed. There was no pointed allusion to the circumstances which were in the minds of all ; but even in the words of the text alone there was comfort for those from whom so much of earthly treasure

had been taken ; and warning for those to whom so much had been unexpectedly given. As the preacher dwelt on the responsibility inseparable from all the good things of this world, Sissie noticed that her father was deeply moved, and glancing from him to her mother, she saw that Lady Monk was looking at her husband with a face of such intense agitation, that Sissie, in alarm, took from Phoebe the restorative, with which some member of the party was always provided. Lady Monk, however, refused the medicine, and just then the sermon came to a close, and the congregation was dismissed.

According to a custom with which Sir Percy had been long familiar, the Monk's Own party remained in the church till every one else had left. Mrs. Rupert Monk and her children had moved directly the service was over, and Sissie thought, with disappointment, that she should not have the opportunity of speaking to them. All the

rest of the congregation was assembled in the churchyard, with the evident intention of having a good stare at the new family. Sir Percy recognised two or three old friends, and spoke with his usual frank cordiality to several of the farmers and their wives. Sissie, however, thought her father particularly ungracious to one would-be friend, who shook him most affectionately by both hands, and claimed an introduction to Lady Monk.

"I should be very happy," said Sir Percy, with a dignity which Captain Monk could never have displayed, "but I really cannot at this moment recall your name. Your face seems familiar to me—but——"

"Well, that's strange!" remarked the other, with a loud laugh. "You and I were pretty thick once, Sir Percy; and *my* name is not changed."

"You really must pardon me, but we soldiers make such a number of acquaintances

in various parts of the world, that we are apt to forget some."

"I shouldn't have thought you would forget Dick Rice."

"Rice—Rice—Nellie, let me introduce my—a—friend, Mr. Rice."

"Happy to make your acquaintance, Lady Monk. Very glad we are to have you as neighbours; though your good husband here seems to have half a mind to give the cut direct to his old friends."

"Rice—let me see," said Sir Percy, not hearing the reproach, in his efforts to awaken his dormant memory, "I am beginning to remember. You have that pretty place on the hill, going over towards Monk's Own?"

"To be sure! And pretty sport you have had there—though I say it as shouldn't."

"Ah, yes! That's it. You and poor Henry—were——" Sir Percy stopped, as Rupert Monk's youngest child came running towards him.

"Cousin Percy! Mamma says, will you, please, come and see her in grandpapa's garden. She doesn't like to see you here," said the little girl.

"Won't you say, 'How do you do?' Lottie!"

"How do you do, Cousin Percy," repeated the child, absently. "Is that my cousin Edmund?" she added, turning eagerly towards the boy, who, though not usually shy, blushed crimson at this sudden notice in public. Without waiting for an answer, Lottie took his hand, and saying, confidentially, "I have got so much to say to you," led him towards the Rectory garden.

"One moment, Sir Percy!" exclaimed the pertinacious Mr. Rice, as the Monks were turning to follow the two children, "let me make you acquainted with my wife and daughters." As he spoke he beckoned to a group who were standing a little apart, and

who immediately advanced. A tall, handsome woman, who would have been elegant if she had not been somewhat fantastical in her dress, and a little affected in her manner, was first introduced, with great form, as "Mrs. Rice;" then came a short, plain girl of about eighteen, whose plainness was, however, redeemed by a brilliant smile when her father presented her as "My daughter, Miss Rice." The next introduction was much more interesting to all the party. After the mother and elder daughter there glided up a little creature, who might not have been more than twelve years of age, had it not been for something womanly in her expression, and in her manner. She was in reality seventeen, but was so tiny, and so soft looking, that every one still treated her as a child. Everything about her was soft—there was the softest bloom on her rounded cheeks,—the softest beam in her dove-like eyes,—the softest smile on her

rosy lips,—the softest tone in her low voice. Sissie could never have imagined anything so soft and sweet as “My daughter Sophie,” and she was so struck with this new acquaintance, that she almost forgot her anxiety to see her cousins. There was one more of the Rice family to be introduced. This was a little, dapper man of about thirty, very handsome, and very well aware that he was handsome, but agreeable, well educated, and better bred than his father, whose noisy talk and boisterous laughter so overpowered Lady Monk, that after bearing it patiently for some time, she was forced to beat a retreat towards the Rectory. The others followed. Mr. Rice would have done the same, but his daughter reminded him that under present circumstances it would be hardly seemly, and he was reluctantly obliged to part from his new friends, with many loudly-expressed hopes of soon meeting them again.

Just as the two parties had separated, Dr. Bligh and his son, who acted as his curate, came out of the church and met the Rices, who were retracing their steps from the Rectory gate.

"Good-morning, Rice," said the Rector, in his full, hearty voice. "I am sorry I can't ask you in to-day, Mrs. Rice, but my poor girl is hardly fit for company yet. I have got to scold you, Miss Soph. If you don't keep your class in better order than you did this morning, we must send you to school again, instead of making a teacher of you."

"I am very sorry, Dr. Bligh," answered the little cooing voice, "but I could not help it,—the boys would quarrel which should hold the book for me. It is too heavy for me to hold."

"Well, we must get something better suited to the powers of a fairy. Good-morning, ladies,—I must speak to my new

parishioners. Perhaps I may get a new teacher there, Sophie. Are you coming, Wat?"

With two or three rapid strides the Rector then overtook Sissie and her father—Lady Monk and Herbert were already in the Rectory garden.

"Welcome to Monk's Kirk, Percy. I can say that, and feel it too, my boy, though such a sad loss to us has brought you here. I am afraid your wife is not very strong. I saw I was preaching her to death, so I drew up short."

"The journey here was rather too much for her," answered Sir Percy. "I believe she ought not to have come to church this morning."

"And somebody else ought not to have been so late in coming," remarked the Rector, with a kind smile at Sissie.

"No, I know it was very wrong," said Sissie, blushing, "but we went to the shore,

and it was so beautiful there. We never saw the sea before."

"Then I will excuse you this once. I have got designs upon you, young lady. Did you ever take a class in a Sunday-school?"

"No, never."

"Will you?"

"If you think I can. I am very ignorant."

"You can, I know. You may be ignorant, but you are very sensible."

"That she is, Doctor!" exclaimed Sir Percy. "Her sense quite alarms me; in fact my children are all beyond my comprehension."

"Which was never very great," said the Rector, with a cheery laugh. "What work we had to get you over the Ass's-bridge. Well, well! we didn't think then that you would ever be at Monk's Own as its master!"

"Come, come, Dr. Bligh! I was not such

a dunce as you would make me out. I was first in classics, remember."

"That's true; but you stuck fast at figures and lines. This little girl of yours is not a bit like you. I'd back her to get over the Ass's-bridge at a bound."

"The Ass's-bridge in Euclid?" asked Sissie. "I have been through the two first books."

"I knew it!" cried the Rector, triumphantly. "Here comes my poor girl," he added, dropping his voice, as Mrs. Rupert came on to the lawn, and stopped to speak to the more advanced party. "You would hardly believe it, but she had not a white hair in her head before she lost poor Rupert, and now she is as grey as I am."

Mrs. Rupert Monk was remarkably tall, like her father and her brother, and like them she had about her a kind of grand self-confidence. Not merely self-possession, and far removed from self-esteem, — an

indescribable *something* which never fails to inspire confidence in others—perhaps because it implies that the possessor of it knows himself to be worthy of confidence. She was not a handsome woman,—her features were too masculine, and her complexion too sallow for beauty,—and yet there was an unusual attractiveness in her appearance—almost as great as there was in the appearance of her remarkably handsome brother, who came up just as the rest of the party met in the garden.

It was an embarrassing meeting, which it required all the Rector's heartiness, all his son's gentleness, all Sir Percy's tact, and all Mrs. Rupert's calmness, to save from being a most painful one. Sissie was so interested in the widow, that she hardly looked at any one else, until Mrs. Rupert said, "Take your cousins in to luncheon, girls. I am sure Lady Monk would be all the better for remaining quietly out here. You can send

something out to us. You will excuse me, I know, Percy. Papa and Laura will take good care of you."

The ladies were therefore left in the garden, whilst Sissie was taken possession of by her two elder cousins, and the boys were condescendingly patronised by little Lottie. Laura and Lucy were a remarkable contrast to each other. Laura was tall, and had the marked features and sallow complexion of her mother's family, whilst Lucy was a little thing, with the delicate features and fair white skin of the Monks. Lucy had also inherited the beautifully-shaped eyes, which Sissie and Edmund had already discovered to be the most striking trait in the family picture gallery.

Sissie had quickly decided that she preferred Lucy to Laura; and when it came out that Lucy had a pet dog and a pet kitten, that she thought her Grandfather Bligh the best man that ever lived, and that she

had almost broken her heart at leaving Monk's Own, it was a matter of course that the two girls should become fast friends. There was only one drawback to the friendship—Lucy was afraid of horses, and could never be induced to ride. However, it was impossible that an acquaintance with Rufus should not overcome this fear, and it was agreed that an attempt should be made the very next day.

Laura looked rather sullen whilst the other two girls were becoming so friendly. She was wrapped up in Lucy,—but she looked upon her as a doll, to be petted and made much of, not as a companion. Laura was very womanly for her age, whilst Lucy was very childish, so that companionship between them was difficult; and Laura had never expected Lucy to enter into her pursuits and interests, but she was not pleased to see her entering so speedily into the pursuits and interests of a stranger.

Nor was Laura the only one whose peace of mind was disturbed by this first meeting of the two branches of the Monk family. Edmund had not found Lottie a congenial associate. She knew nothing of books, could give him no information about Monk's Own or the family traditions, and insisted upon showing him rabbits and birds, in which he took no interest. It was all very well for Herbert to care for such things. Herbert had not read all the great English poets, and Herbert was not likely ever to be Monk of Monk's Own. It was ridiculous that they should all seem to think such a child as Lottie a fit companion for the future head of the family. And, in the meantime, there was Sissie quite happy without him, and talking and laughing with her new friend as if she had entirely forgotten the old days at Cover-heath, when she and he were all the world to each other. Poor Edmund! Eager as he had been to reach the unknown future

in the new home, he was already beginning to regret the happy past in the old home. Imagination often plays her votaries these shabby tricks.

CHAPTER VII.

IN her affectionate intimacy with Lucy, in her pleasant visiting amongst the few neighbouring families, and in her friendly intercourse with her father's tenantry, Sissie soon found so much congenial occupation, that her life at Monk's Own became a very happy one—far happier and more mentally healthful than the strange, wild, dreamy life at Cover-heath, which was now gradually fading away into a dim memory.

It was very different with Edmund. The boy's mind had been suffered to take its own course, without any external guidance, and it had made rapid progress in some directions, whilst in others it was less advanced

than the mind of many a child of ten. With Cover-heath this liberty had passed away. Such self-culture had been all very well for the son of plain Captain Monk, but it was necessary that the heir of Sir Percy Monk, of Monk's Own, should be educated in orthodox style. With this view it was soon arranged that Edmund and Herbert should spend every day at Monk's Kirk Rectory, in order that Walter Bligh might prepare them for Eton, as his father had prepared their father. So Edmund's fertile brain was starved upon Latin grammar and Euclid; and his imagination, which had run riot during all his previous studies, was now cramped and confined amongst rules and systems, against which it beat itself, like an imprisoned bird beating itself against the bars of its cage. Clever as Edmund was, Mr. Bligh had great difficulty in getting him prepared in time; but the task was accomplished, and the boy was entered at

Eton in little more than a year after the change in the family fortunes. Herbert was not so fortunate. When the time came for him to try, he failed to pass the examination, and his destination was, therefore, Harrow, to which school he could be admitted a year later than to Eton. In the meantime he continued to study with Walter Bligh, who declared that he would rather have to work with Herbert's dulness than with Edmund's erratic genius.

The three years that had got the boys to this point in their education had made other changes at Monk's Own. Lady Monk had been gradually sinking—with occasional transient revivals—ever since the move from Cover-heath, and during the third spring after that move, she died. Change to a warmer climate had been repeatedly urged upon her, but she had always strenuously resisted every persuasion to leave home, even if accompanied by all her family. She

had never laid aside the saving habits acquired at Cover-heath, and for some time before her death, her dread of expense had become a complete monomania. Her husband appeared to have caught the infection, for after his bereavement his whole interest in life seemed to centre upon the improvement of the property, as far as was compatible with the avoidance of every unnecessary outlay. One other object, which seemed in some way connected with the first, was to push the boys on in their studies, and to inspire them with the ambition of making their way in the world. All this was so unlike the careless, easy-tempered, free-handed Captain Monk of former times, that the children noticed the change with something like awe, and the family friends said that Percy Monk had not been the same man since his wife's death.

Edmund also was very unlike the same boy that had left Cover-heath, as Sissie

observed with sorrow every time she saw him ; but more especially when he came home for the first summer holidays after his mother's death. He had grown tall, and very thin and pale, but that was not the greatest change. His eyes were so dull, and his expression so heavy and despondent, that Sissie, as soon as they were alone together, on the top of the old tower, which Edmund always visited the first thing on his return, inquired anxiously whether he were well.

"Yes, very well. At least, I think so. I never feel well now."

"Is the work too much for you, dear?"

"No ; it isn't that. I work very hard—there's nothing else to do. But I don't mind work."

"Are not you happy, Edmund?"

"Happy! No. How can a fellow be happy? I am miserable."

"Why? Are the boys unkind?"

"Yes. They're unkind enough. Of

course they are unkind. They don't understand me, and I hate them. But it isn't that—it is—oh, Sissie, I *must* tell you. I shall go mad if I keep it to myself any longer!"

"What is it?" asked Sissie, in great alarm at her brother's wild look and manner. "Is it anything you ought not to tell me?"

"No—yes it is. Mamma said I must not tell any one. But she could not have wanted to drive me mad. Sissie," coming close and whispering, "there is another heir to Monk's Own. Mamma told me so."

"How, Edmund? What do you mean?"

"When she was ill," pursued the boy, his teeth chattering with excitement, and a hectic spot appearing on each of his pale cheeks, "she called me to her one day, about a week before she died, you know; and she told me, if ever I should have Monk's Own, never to rest till I had found out the real heir, and given it up to him."

"Was that all she said?" asked Sissie, as her brother paused.

"No; she said besides—oh, Sissie, it was so awful! She got up in bed (you know she hadn't sat up for weeks), and she looked at me in such an awful way, and then she said, in a sort of shriek, 'Henry Monk had a son. I know he had. And that is killing me. But never tell anybody.' Then she sank down quite suddenly, and I thought she was dying, and I was just going to run for somebody, but she started up again and said, 'Your father is not to blame—mind that, Edmund! Mind that!' And then I could not understand what she said, so I called Phoebe, and after that she never said anything that any one could understand. So her last words were what she said to me, and they have haunted me ever since. And, Sissie, it is killing me, as it killed her."

Sissie, shocked and startled though she naturally was, set to work to soothe her

brother, reminding him that for weeks, even months, before her death, their mother had been occasionally not in her right mind, and had said and done many things which could only be accounted for as the wanderings of a diseased brain. She also recalled to his mind the fact that their father—who had first started the idea of a nearer heir than himself—had been overruled by all the rest of the family, who were persuaded that such a thing was quite impossible. Miss Colquhoun, who was always right, had laughed at the idea of a marriage having been kept secret so long. She ended by imploring Edmund not to let his imagination dwell on a possibility, which though very common in story-books, was not the sort of thing that happened in real life.

Sissie succeeded in convincing herself, but not in convincing Edmund; who averred that his mother had been quite herself when she spoke to him, and that he must always

regard her words as imposing upon him a solemn trust, which he must spend his life in striving to fulfil. Sissie found that her arguments were quite in vain, and only had the effect of estranging Edmund from herself, as one who could not, or would not sympathise in the belief which had taken such entire hold of him. He grew so excited at last, that Sissie began to cast about for some means of diverting his attention, and was delighted to see approaching the house a party of people, amongst whom she recognised Sophie and Stephen Rice.

"Look, Beppo!" she cried to the dog, who had been sitting gravely by, with his beautiful, wistful brown eyes fixed first on one, and then on the other, of the agitated speakers. Beppo, thus addressed, sprang lightly on to the battlement, and looked down towards the road. "See them, good dog? Hie! fetch then!" continued Sissie; and the dog, after one eager intelligent

glance in her face, tore barking down the stairs, and out into the park.

"Look at him, Edmund. Dear old fellow. Isn't he the cleverest dog that ever lived?"

Edmund did not pay much attention to this, but Sissie's stratagem had the desired result. Directly Beppo reached the advancing party, he wheeled round in front of them, and saying, as plainly as speech could say, "Follow me," led them to the old tower, and in a few minutes Walter Bligh's voice called up the steps, "Are you there, Sissie? May we invade your sanctum?"

"Come up, Mr. Bligh," answered Sissie, joyfully. "If we were to come to meet you there would be a collision in the dark."

Sissie went forward with outstretched hands to meet her friend. But there suddenly emerged from the winding staircase somebody who was *not* Walter Bligh, but was so like him, that for a moment Sissie was puzzled.

"Mr. Bligh!" she exclaimed, in her surprise.

"Yes, but not *your* Mr. Bligh," answered the stranger, taking one of the hands which she had extended. "We ought to know each other," he continued, "for I have heard a great deal of Miss Monk, and I daresay Maria and Walter have sometimes spoken of their brother Wilfred."

"Very often, Captain Bligh, and so have a great many other people. All the parish has been looking forward impatiently to your return. But I was stupid enough to be puzzled by your likeness to your brother."

"Are we alike?" asked Walter Bligh, placing himself beside the other, and holding Sissie's two hands with all the affectionate familiarity of an old friend and occasional tutor.

"No," said Sissie, frankly; "not when you stand together."

"I am not such a grim fellow as he is, am I?"

"I am not such a trim fellow as he is, am I?" asked the other brother, laughing.

"It is only the difference in your professions that makes the difference in you," said Stephen Rice, who, with his sister, had now also emerged on to the open space. "A sailor must be grim, and a parson must be trim."

"A sailor need not be grim," remarked Sissie, in a low voice, thinking of her gentle grandfather.

"Must a parson be trim, Sissie?" asked Walter.

"No. Is Dr. Bligh trim?"

"Well, Wilfred, we have managed to catch it between us. You must be content to be grim, and I to be trim. Is it so, Sophie?"

"I am afraid you cannot either of you deny the impeachment," answered Sophie's

soft voice, and each of the brothers got, for consolation, the softest possible glance from the dove-like eyes.

The sailor immediately strode up to her side, and made some remark on the view from the tower. His brother turned with a start towards another stranger, who had appeared on the scene a little after the others, and said, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Preston. My brother and I have both been so occupied with our own personal appearance, that we have forgotten our duties. Sissie, let me introduce Mr. Arnold Preston to you. There is some hope that he may make a settlement in the parish."

"I hope you will, Mr. Preston," said Sissie, with her usual frank cordiality. "It is the pleasantest parish in England, I am certain, though I only know one other."

"Then I may conclude that, at any rate, it is the pleasanter of *two* parishes," answered the new arrival, with a slightly

satirical tone in a voice of which every note was musical.

"Your friend is laughing at my want of logic, Mr. Bligh. Will you tell him it is your fault?" said Sissie, looking half-ashamed and half-defiant at the stranger, who had presumed to sneer at the pet of the parish.

"Willingly," returned Walter. "You must understand, Mr. Preston, that some time since Miss Monk desired me to initiate her into the study of logic. I obeyed, as in duty bound; but we had no sooner begun, than she plunged me headlong into such a sea of difficulties, and so ruthlessly turned my own weapons against me, that I fled from the field fairly beaten, and have been degraded in her eyes ever since. Now I shall be called to account for having used two metaphors," he added, with a deprecatory glance at Sissie.

"What colour do you prefer, Miss

Monk?" asked Mr. Preston, with the same hardly perceptible tinge of satire in his look and tone.

"Blue," answered Sissie, so gravely, that the young man was doubtful whether or not she had seen the drift of his question.

"I thought so," he said, drily; and then, in an entirely different tone, asked, "Are you so happy as to be the owner of this charming dog?"

Sissie was propitiated at once.

"Is not he a dear old fellow?" she cried.

"I have had him ever since he was a puppy; he is only five years younger than I am. Come here, Beppo, and say, 'How-do-you-do?'"

Beppo came forward immediately, and held up his paw, as he was bid. He then laid his head lovingly against the young man's knee.

"That is a most unusual honour to a stranger," exclaimed Sissie. "I never before

knew him so affectionate to any one but ourselves."

"Dogs always recognise their friends," replied Mr. Preston. "You know how much I like you, don't you, old boy?" to Beppo.

"That dog is Miss Monk's idol," remarked Stephen Rice, rather rudely.

Sissie coloured. "He is my best friend, excepting two or three," she added, with a shyly repentant glance at Walter Bligh, who was, however, not attending to her, but to his brother and Sophie Rice.

Stephen Rice looked very angry. "I should think your *friend*," laying a great stress on the word "friend," and looking meaningly at Walter, "would hardly approve of your thinking more of a brute than of any of us Christians."

"Are you sure the brute is not a better Christian than any of us, Mr. Rice?" asked young Preston.

"You had better ask Bligh," returned

Stephen, with a sneer, which had in it none of the refinement of the other's satirical tone.

Mr. Preston turned at once to Walter. "Your profession gives you many opportunities of studying human nature, Mr. Bligh ; will you tell us whether you have ever met with men who are worse Christians than this dog ?"

Walter answered with the approving smile which Sissie so loved to gain from him. "Certainly I have. But you have put a leading question ; you evidently wish to draw from me an opinion which shall concur with your own. Had you not better give us your opinion ?"

"It is simply this," answered the stranger, in a manner very unlike the somewhat contemptuous indifference with which he had hitherto spoken ; "this noble fellow," laying his hand on Beppo's head, "has a very simple code of laws. To him the whole

duty of dog is comprised in the rule, 'Obey and protect your mistress.' We have certainly more complex obligations, but can we any of us say that we have fulfilled one single duty in life as honourably and thoroughly as Beppo fulfils every one of his duties?"

"No," said Walter, heartily, "that we cannot. You are quite right, Mr. Preston. But I don't think we must call Beppo a Christian."

"I understand you," answered the young man, quietly. "I was wrong to use the word."

"I agree with you," continued Walter, "that Beppo would be a most powerful preacher, if we had but ears to hear him."

All laughed as Beppo, knowing that he was the subject of conversation, seated himself solemnly on the low wall, and raised his head in the air, very much like a preacher about to begin his sermon. With a sudden

change of mood, young Preston tied his white handkerchief round the dog's throat, to represent clerical bands, lifted Beppo's paw in the air, and began in a snuffling drawl, "Dearly beloved brethen." In a moment he seemed to recollect himself, coloured slightly, and turning to Walter, said, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Bligh. I quite forgot that you might consider this very rude."

"I did not recognise myself, I assure you," answered Walter, kindly.

"I think, though," remarked Sissie, looking affectionately at her tutor, "that you are almost as good a Christian as Beppo."

"Then," said Mr. Preston, "I shall certainly persuade my father to buy Kirklands, for I have found what I have been seeking all my life."

"Have you been seeking Mr. Bligh all your life, Mr. Preston?" asked Sophie, who had only heard the last few words.

"Yes, for I am told that Mr. Bligh is almost as good as a dog."

"I can say more for him than that," said Wilfred Bligh. "I believe that he is almost as good as a ship."

"Pardon me, Captain Bligh, that is not so good. A ship may have a dog's high principle, but it cannot have his heart."

"Shall I say what *I* think?" asked Sophie, with an arch glance from the one brother to the other. "I think that you are the ship, and Mr. Walter is the dog."

"Then I have no heart?" said Wilfred, turning away with a cloud on his face, which only Sissie saw.

"Will you come in and have a cup of tea?" she said, wishing to make some advance to him. "I think papa is at home, and he will be so glad to see you." As she spoke, her heart sank at the thought that she no longer knew what would make her father glad or sorry.

"I should like to see your father," returned Captain Bligh. "How much has happened since we met!" he added, as they descended the tower staircase. "How well I remember when Wat and I thought it the grandest treat to be allowed to go out shooting with your father and the other two poor fellows. Now they are both gone! And poor Rupert's boys too! Your brother seems a fine lad, but he looks delicate."

"He is not strong," replied Sissie. "Captain Bligh!" she added, impulsively, "don't you hate us for being in your brother-in-law's place?"

Captain Bligh gave a smile almost like Walter's, as he answered, "Those of you that I have seen do not appear to me to be very hateful; and as a lad I liked your father better than either of his cousins. Poor Rupert made Maria a very good husband, and I believe he was a capital fellow, but I

doubt whether he had much in him. Harry had all the brains, but he was a little cracked, I fancy."

"I will say 'good-bye' now, Miss Monk," said young Preston, hurrying after Sissie and her companion. "I am going to walk on with Miss Rice and her brother. I shall hope to see you again very often, if I can persuade my father to settle in 'the pleasantest parish in England,' but I will not now force myself into your house, as I did into your outpost." And with a bow, he was gone.

"That is a pleasant fellow, is he not?" asked Captain Bligh.

"Ye—es," answered Sissie, rather doubtfully. "There is papa," she cried, as Sir Percy crossed the lawn. "Papa, here is an old friend of yours."

"A very old friend," said Sir Percy, coming towards Bligh with the ghost of his former gay courtesy. "Welcome home,

Wilfred! I did not know we might expect you so soon."

"I came earlier than I thought. My poor old ship got so knocked about in the gales last month, that she had to be laid up for repairs at Toulon, so I took the opportunity of running home to see my father, and everybody."

"You found your father very little altered?"

"Very little. Walter is a great help and comfort to him."

"Walter is here, I see, and the Rices. Who else was with you just now?" asked Sir Percy, looking down the road after young Preston, with the suspicious glance which he now so often cast towards any stranger.

"That was a young fellow I met, with his father and mother, on my way from Toulon. They had been travelling in Italy and the south of France. The father is some sort of

manufacturer at Dorlington, I think, and he has a fancy for buying a place in this neighbourhood. The son came with me to look out for something. He is rather taken with Kirklands, which he saw this morning. The father is evidently a self-made man, but the youngster is 'a good sort,' as we used to say. The mother is a lady-like little woman."

"They must have plenty of money to think of Kirklands."

"There is no doubt of that. There was a courier, and a valet, and a maid, and all kinds of expensive luxuries."

"What is the young man like, Sissie?" asked Sir Percy, turning to his daughter, with a kind of thoughtful eagerness that seemed quite disproportioned to the occasion.

"I hardly know, papa, excepting that he has the most beautiful voice I ever heard."

"Is he handsome?"

"No, not at all. I should call him plain, should not you, Captain Bligh?"

"I think not. He is certainly not handsome. But his appearance is so very uncommon that it cannot be called plain. He has that remarkable peculiarity, Sir Percy, of light hair and very dark eyes and eyebrows; and there is an immense deal of power in his face. If I wanted a man to sail my ship for me, that's the kind of face I would choose. What do you say, Walter?" as his brother joined them. "Has not that young Preston a face to trust in?"

"You read faces as much as ever, I see, Will. Yes, that lad has impressed me very favourably, too. He is a little self-opinionated, of course, as all very young men are who are worth anything."

"And as only the clergy have a right to be, eh, Wat?"

"Did I say that, Will? Are you coming with me, for I must be off?"

“ We shall meet again to-morrow, I hope,” said Sir Percy to the captain, so unmistakably intimating that he did not want more of his company to-day, that Wilfred at once linked his arm in Walter’s, and the two walked off together.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN BLIGH seemed to have read young Preston's face correctly, to judge by the prompt manner in which he settled about Kirklands. Within a month after he first saw the place, the whole family moved there, the process of furnishing having been superintended by the young man, who was constantly to and fro, and to whom the entire arrangement of everything seemed to be confided by his parents, neither of whom had seen the house until they came to take possession of it. This return of life to what had long been a blank in the neighbourhood, Kirklands having been unoccupied for many years, caused a general excitement, and

eager was the speculation as to whether or not Mr. and Mrs. Preston would prove to be pleasant people. Wilfred Bligh's account of his fellow-travellers passed from mouth to mouth, with additions or curtailments according to the fancy of each speaker. Though young Preston was not so popular as he might have been, owing to the fact that something in his manner always suggested the suspicion that he was laughing at those to whom he spoke, there was, nevertheless, a very general feeling that this sample of the family promised well for the other members.

In these speculations Sissie took very little interest, for at this time all her thoughts were absorbed in anxiety about Edmund. After their conversation at the beginning of the holidays, the boy never again alluded to the idea which haunted him, but Sissie felt certain that its hold upon his mind was as strong as ever. He would sit for hours lost in gloomy reverie, or wander away by himself

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for the whole day, coming home tired and foot-sore, but never saying where he had been; indeed it seemed very doubtful whether he knew where he had been. These solitary rambles were a constant anxiety to Sissie, who, during her brother's absence, could do nothing but watch for his return, and could never now be induced to follow her usual pursuits away from home.

"I believe you have been bewitched, Sissie," said Lucy, one morning that she and Laura had come with the hope of getting their cousin to walk with them, as she used to be always so ready to do. "We are going for just the scramble you like, over the Fell to see an old woman Uncle Wilfred used to know. Uncle Walter is to meet us on our way back, and we are all to have luncheon by a little out-of-the-way tarn, where my uncles used to fish when they were boys. Do come," she added, putting her arm affectionately round Sissie's neck.

"I don't think I can, Lucy," replied Sissie.
"Perhaps I may come and meet you at the tarn, if you can tell me where it is. Won't you come too, Edmund?"

"No, you don't want me. I should be no good to any one," returned the boy—not sullenly, but sadly.

"You could come with Uncle Walter," pursued Lucy, "if you really will not go with us. Uncle Walter had to go over to Kirklands this morning, because he promised Mr. Arnold Preston that he would help him to weed the library. You know Mr. Preston has bought the old library, and Mr. Arnold says there is a lot of rubbish in it, but he cannot depend on himself alone to decide what is worth keeping."

"I thought his father and mother were coming," remarked Sissie.

"They came yesterday," said Laura.
"Grandpapa met them in the village, and was introduced. Sophie Rice was with him,

and she says Mr. Preston is very vulgar. Mrs. Preston is an insignificant-looking little woman, but she spoke like a lady."

"She must be a lady," began Lucy, eagerly, "or her son could not be so——" she stopped, and coloured deeply.

"You like him, Lucy?"

"Yes, O yes! Don't you?"

"I never can make up my mind," returned Sissie. "I like some things in him."

"My uncles both think so very highly of him," observed Lucy.

"Uncle Wilfred will be waiting for us if we stay any longer, Lucy," said Laura. "He went in at the Hermitage for a few minutes," she explained to Sissie; "but he said he should be here quite as soon as you would be ready."

"Uncle Wilfred's 'few minutes' at the Hermitage are always rather longer than he intends," said Lucy, laughing. "Do you think Sophie is a flirt, Sissie?"

"No. I don't know. With whom could she flirt?"

"With whom! Oh, you innocent child! With my two poor uncles, of course."

"With your uncles! What nonsense, Lucy!"

"Why should it be nonsense, Sissie?"

"They are so much older than she is."

"Not so much. Sophie is twenty, and Uncle Walter is only thirty. Uncle Wilfred is not more than thirty-four."

"Lucy, we *must* go," said Laura.

"Then you will meet us at the tarn, Sissie. Uncle Walter is to start at twelve; if you are on the road then, you are sure to see him. Good-bye till then." And the two girls hurried out.

"Do you think papa will be much longer, Sissie?" asked Edmund.

"I never knew him keep the breakfast so late before," Sissie answered.

"I cannot stay in any longer."

"Oh, Edmund! you know papa does not like you to go away without seeing him. Do wait a little longer." After a short pause, Sissie added, timidly, "I wish you would go with me on to the fell, Edmund."

"What is the good, Sissie? I only spoil every one's pleasure; I am better alone."

"But I cannot bear you to be so much alone, Edmund. It is not good for you, dear."

"Nothing's good for me. How can it be? The greatest kindness any one could do for me would be to knock my brains out."

"Edmund!"

"It is all very well to say 'Edmund!' Sissie, but I cannot go on like this—my life is simply intolerable."

"Then you had better speak to papa, Edmund. There is nothing else that you can do."

"No, that is true enough. There is

nothing else. All that I could do would be groping in the dark."

"Papa will, I am sure, be able to prove to you that you are worrying yourself about nothing."

"If I could only hope that!" cried Edmund, bitterly. "Here is papa. I shall speak to him now, Sissie."

Sissie's heart began to beat very fast. How unlike the days when they could say anything to their father!

Sir Percy came in briskly. "I am very sorry to be so late, Sissie," he said. "First, I overslept myself, and then everything went wrong in my dressing. Never mind what you give me, darling. I deserve cold tea and hard eggs. Good-morning, my boy."

"Papa," began Edmund, breathlessly, and without raising his eyes to his father's face, "I have got something to say to you; a question to ask you."

Edmund was pale, but Sir Percy turned paler still.

"What is it, Edmund?" he asked, sternly.

"Are you quite sure there is not a nearer heir to Monk's Own than you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Mamma spoke about it—just at the last, papa. She said the fear of it had killed her, and I know it is killing me."

"Edmund, never let me hear that again. You know that your poor mother was not herself at that time, and yet you bring up her words to cast in my face!"

"But, papa, it is my duty—if there should be a nearer heir, how can I——"

"How can *you*! *Your* duty! Stop, sir! Monk's Own is not yours yet. You may be in a great hurry to get me out of the way, but until you do, Monk's Own is mine, and I will not be frightened out of it by any fool's stories. Once for all, Edmund, if

I hear another word of this, you leave my house for ever! Do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Edmund, quietly, as he left the room.

Sir Percy had been standing whilst he spoke, his face working with passion, and his whole slight nervous form trembling from head to foot. As soon as Edmund was gone, he sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, broke into a paroxysm of sobbing, such as Sissie had before seen him give way to at the time of her mother's death.

"Dear papa, never mind," said Sissie, drawing near when the first burst was over, and laying her hand gently on her father's shoulder. "Edmund is not quite right just now. He does not know what he says. I think he has been working too hard."

"He does not know what he does when he wants to set all the world pointing at his father as a scoundrel! Let him find the

heir he talks about, and I shall be glad enough to make way for him. Monk's Own has not been such a bed of roses to me that I should care to keep it. It has been a bed of sharpest nettles. Would to God I had never seen the place! There, Sissie, have the things taken away, Edmund has given me my breakfast. To think that my poor darling, who would have sacrificed her life to save me from a finger-ache, should have been made the instrument to give me such a stab as this! It was not your fault, Sissie. Give me a kiss, my child, and don't look so pale and scared. Edmund will come to his right senses soon, perhaps."

Having waited till her father had recovered his equanimity, Sissie now went in search of her brother, fearing that he would have still more need of soothing. In the hall she saw Edmund, with his gun in his hand.

"Where are you going, Edmund?"

"I am going to get a shot at a hawk. I must do something."

A terrible fear took possession of Sissie.

"Let me come with you," she said, and before Edmund could object, she had caught up a hat from a peg in the hall, and was ready to start.

"It is of no use for you to come; I am going to walk for hours."

"I can go part of the way with you."

"You can't come home alone."

"Why, Edmund, you don't think I should mind that. But I wish you would go with me as far as Monk's Kirk. Which way did you think of going?"

"To the moors above Kirklands."

"Then you will walk with me?"

Edmund could not refuse, but he was not to be beguiled into any talk by the way, and Sissie was obliged to address her conversation to Beppo. In Monk's Kirk they met Dr. Bligh.

"Is Uncle Walter at home, grândpapa?" asked Sissie, who occasionally designated her cousin's relatives in the same manner as they did.

"No, he is up at Kirklands. I am going up there to fetch him. Poor Mrs. Cooper is dying, and she has a great wish to see Wat."

"Can we take a message for you?" asked Sissie. "We are going that way."

"I wish you would. I have my sermon to write this morning, and a hot walk is a bad preparation for sermon-writing. Good children, to come to my relief. Don't you walk too far, Master Edmund, you don't look fit for much."

At the gate of Kirklands Edmund wished to strike off across the moor.

"Just go to the door with me, please, Edmund; it would be awkward for me to go up to the house alone, as I don't know Mrs. Preston," said Sissie, hypocritically; for

most people thought that she was reprehensibly indifferent to such considerations.

Edmund, boy like, had a great respect for conventionalities, so he yielded at once when his sister appealed to the proprieties.

Sissie's message brought Walter out, and with him Arnold Preston.

"I am sorry I cannot stay to finish our job, Preston; but I think now you will be able to get on very well without me."

"Yes. You have set me in the right way, and I think I may contrive to go alone in it. I ought to get the box off by the carrier to-night, so I won't walk with you, as I should like. Just to the gate I will, though, if Miss Monk will excuse my dirty hands. That is a first-rate gun of your's, Mr. Monk; how far does it carry?"

"What is wrong, Sissie?" asked Walter, kindly, as the other two went on a little in front. "I don't like your looks at all."

"There is something wrong with Edmund,

Uncle Walter. He wants to go off alone with his gun, and I am afraid to let him."

"Where does he want to go?"

"On to the moor."

"I am going across the fell presently, if I can get away. I wonder whether he would wait for me. Here, Edmund."

But at this moment the other two had reached the gate, had shaken hands, and Edmund was walking rapidly over the moor.

"Oh, stop him!" cried Sissie; "he must not go!"

"Do you want him, Miss Monk? Here, Monk! Hallo! your sister wants you!" But Edmund only shook his head, and strode rapidly on.

"What shall I do, Uncle Walter?" asked Sissie, despairingly.

"I *must* go to this poor old woman," answered Walter, "or I would take care of him."

"Can I do anything?" asked Arnold

Preston. "Shall I fetch your brother back, Miss Monk?"

"I am afraid it is of no use," answered Sissie, looking doubtfully at Walter.

"Do you want an escort anywhere?" asked Arnold again. "I should be very happy."

"Oh, no, it is not that."

"It is that her brother is not well, and she is afraid he will knock himself up," explained Walter.

"He does not look well," returned Arnold, with ready sympathy. "I tell you what I will do, Miss Monk. I will get my gun, and overtake him in five minutes. I told him of a short cut across to the South-moor gap, but I know a shorter, which I thought he might mistake. You trust him to me. I promise to take care of him." And, saying the last words as he went, Arnold ran towards the house, and was soon seen carrying his gun along another road towards the moor.

"That is very good-natured of him," said Sissie, "when he is so busy, too! I will walk home with you now, Uncle Walter."

But Sissie was to have more walking this hot day. Before they reached Monk's Kirk they met Caroline and Sophie Rice.

"Cara is going to finish her sketch of the farmhouse at the foot of Kirklands moor," said Sophie. "Won't you come with us, Sissie?"

Sissie was glad of an excuse for remaining near the scene of Edmund's proposed sport, so she readily agreed, and Walter promised that, when he had paid his visit to Mrs. Cooper, he would join them, instead of going on to the fell. The girls found a pleasant seat under the shadow of a little copse, which stretched up the side of the moor, and here Miss Rice worked at her drawing, whilst Sophie and Sissie lay on the grass, and talked in the lazy way in which

people do talk out of doors on a hot day. Beppo tried the shade first of one bush, and then of another, started one or two feeble little chases after rabbits, and was plainly of opinion that his mistress would show much more sense if she would take a good walk over the moor.

At last Beppo pricked up his ears and listened. Sissie listened also, for there was a voice in the copse, and she fancied it was Arnold's. Beppo thought so too, and jumped up, wagging his tail.

"It is too hot for the moor to-day; you had better give it up," said the voice, certainly Arnold's, now close to the border of the copse.

"I don't care for the heat. I must keep moving," answered Edmund, and Beppo disappeared through the hedge. At the same instant there was a loud report and a sharp cry. Sissie sprang to her feet, with the feeling that her undefined dread was realised

at last. Arnold leapt over the hedge from the copse. He was very pale.

"Don't come, Miss Monk," he said.

"Your brother is safe, but poor Beppo——"

"Is he killed?" asked Sissie, calmly.

"He is wounded. You had better wait here a minute."

He leapt back as he spoke. The girls got through a gap at a little distance, and approached the scene of the catastrophe. Arnold was bending over poor Beppo, whose white coat was covered with blood.

"Is the dog dead?" asked Miss Rice.

"I am afraid he will die," returned Arnold. "His wound is internal. This blood comes from his mouth."

Edmund stood at a little distance, with his gun in his hand. Sissie saw with alarm that he was reloading it.

"Look at him!" she cried to Arnold.

Arnold raised his head. The instant he

caught sight of Edmund's dilated eyes and hurried movements, he sprang to his feet.

"Give me that gun, Edmund!"

Edmund took no notice.

"Give me that gun this instant!" repeated Arnold, drawing nearer. Edmund pointed the gun at him, and laid his finger on the trigger. His face had an expression on it which none of those who saw it ever forgot. Sophie fainted. Arnold stepped boldly up, and laid his hand upon the weapon. "Let go, Edmund," he said.

The boy unloosed his hold, gave a low cry, and fell suddenly forward. Arnold dropped the gun, and caught him in his arms.

"He has fainted," he said to Sissie. But Edmund's face was convulsed, his teeth were clenched, and a white froth was on his lips. Arnold knew that this was worse than fainting. "Go to the farmhouse, and send

some one for a doctor," he said. "I will carry him there, if I can."

Sissie flew to do as she was bid. Miss Rice was occupied with her sister. Arnold was left with the insensible boy and the dying dog. The farmhouse was deserted, all the inmates were busy in the fields. Sissie sped on to Monk's Kirk, happily found the doctor at home, and returned with him in about half-an-hour from the time she had left. Edmund was sitting up, leaning against a tree; Beppo was stretched on the ground by his side; Arnold was kneeling close by.

As Sissie came through the gap, Arnold rose to his feet. Sissie never forgot that traces of tears were on his cheeks. "Poor Beppo's pain is over," he said. "He dragged himself to his master's side, licked his hand, and died." The young man passed his sleeve across his eyes, and then tenderly raised the poor dog in his arms.

"I had better take him out of sight," he said, glancing at Edmund, as the doctor drew near.

Sissie followed, and looked on whilst Arnold laid her favourite down on the grass. The young man looked compassionately in her face. "If you would like to cry, don't mind me," he said. "I daresay it would do you good."

"I never cry," Sissie answered, and walked back to where the doctor was vainly trying to induce Edmund to speak or to look up.

"We must get him home," he said. But Edmund took not the slightest notice of the request that he would try to rise, so Sissie went back to Arnold.

"Will you see what you can do, Mr. Preston?" she said. "Mr. Boyd says Edmund ought to be got home, but he will not move. You made him obey you before."

Arnold went up to the boy, and took his

arm. "Now, Edmund," he said, "try if you can walk."

Edmund raised his head, and looked vacantly in young Preston's face.

"I know you can walk now," continued Arnold, steadily returning the look.

Edmund half raised himself. Arnold passed his arm round his waist, and supported him. Thus they moved slowly out of the wood. Mr. Boyd's gig was at the farmhouse. Into this they put Edmund, Arnold still supporting him.

"Is the horse steady, Mr. Boyd? Then I can manage to drive."

"Not too fast," cried the doctor. And they all proceeded together towards Monk's Own—of course gathering a crowd as they went. The two Rices came out of the farmhouse, where they had taken refuge, as the others passed, and followed them at a distance.

As Edmund was lifted from the chaise

he had another seizure, and Mr. Boyd looked very grave about his state. Sissie found her father in the picture-gallery.

"Edmund is not well, papa," she said.

"What is the matter with him?"

"He was out with his gun, and shot poor Beppo by accident, and he has had a kind of fit."

"Is it serious, Sissie?" asked Sir Percy, in a hoarse voice, catching hold of Sissie's arm.

"I am afraid so, papa. I am afraid Mr. Boyd thinks so. He has been very ill for a long time, I am sure."

"Good God! I have killed my boy!" groaned Sir Percy.

Late that night Sissie received a pencilled note from Arnold, to say that he had buried poor Beppo at the foot of Sir Rupert's tower.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER a night of suspense,—during which Sissie and Mr. Boyd watched by the bedside, and Sir Percy stole in and out of the room, with a face of hopeless misery,—Edmund was pronounced to be out of danger. He had a little natural sleep, and on awaking appeared conscious, and took some nourishment with his own hand. The doctor left, ordering that his patient should be kept very quiet, and promising to return in a few hours. Soon after he was gone, Sissie, who was sitting by the window, heard Edmund talking softly to himself. Drawing near to the bed, she saw a sight which turned her cold with a sickening dread.

The boy was counting his fingers, smiling to himself, and muttering.

"What are you saying, dear?" asked Sissie, unable to bear the doubt which had crossed her mind.

"Look here," replied Edmund, holding up both his hands, with the fingers stretched out. "That makes a hundred. Five plus five, that's equal to ten, and ten multiplied by ten, that makes—I don't remember what it was. Now I have lost it. One, two," and he began to count the fingers one by one.

"Never mind that, Edmund," said Sissie, trembling so that she could hardly stand. "I want to tell you about the letter Herbert has had from Andrews."

"I don't understand," said the boy, looking anxiously in his sister's face for a moment, and then glancing round the room.

"Andrews at Cover-heath, you know," repeated Sissie, more and more alarmed.

"I don't understand what you are saying," persisted Edmund, not looking at her at all now. "I wish I could make it out," he continued, again beginning to count his fingers. "One, two, three—I know!" joyfully looking up. "It was a hundred! A hundred what?" he added, again glancing anxiously at Sissie.

"Try and go to sleep, Edmund, darling. It will do you good."

"It isn't bed-time," exclaimed the boy, fretfully. "I don't want to go to sleep. I want to get up. Why don't you let me get up? I want to get up! I want to get up." In the midst of this plaining cry he suddenly exclaimed, with the smile and the manner of an infant, "Look! pretty!" pointing to a sunbeam which was stealing in through the closed curtains.

Poor Sissie could endure it no longer. She hastily called Phoebe, and despatching a messenger for Mr. Boyd, walked up and

down in front of the house until he came. She dared not sooner alarm her father, who, after the favourable report of Edmund, had retired to his study. She could not keep away from the room whilst the doctor made his examination ; but she suffered torture as every word more plainly brought out poor Edmund's imbecility.

"I should like another opinion," said Mr. Boyd, gravely, as Sissie followed him from the room. "Can I see Sir Percy?"

Sissie went to fetch her father, and found him engaged with a heap of old letters.

"Edmund is not so well, papa," she said ; "will you come to Mr. Boyd?"

Sir Percy pushed the papers into a drawer, which he locked, and followed Sissie, without a word.

"I propose to try one more experiment before we have a consultation on the case," said Mr. Boyd, after explaining his view of Edmund's alarming symptoms. "Young

Preston appeared yesterday to have a remarkable influence over my patient. Could he be summoned here without much delay?"

"He is a good-natured young man, is he not, Sissie? I suppose he would not object to coming. Here Herbert," to the boy, whose scared face peeped in at the door. "Take Firefly and gallop over to Kirklands as fast as you can go. Give my compliments to Mr. Arnold Preston, and beg him to come here at once, on a matter of life and death. Let him ride Firefly back. You can walk."

Herbert was off directly, and he certainly spared neither himself nor Firefly, for in less than three quarters of an hour Arnold galloped up to the door. Sir Percy and the doctor were on the steps to receive him.

"I must apologise for troubling you so unceremoniously," Mr. Preston, said Sir Percy. "But my poor boy is in a very sad state,

and Mr. Boyd thinks your influence might be of use."

"I shall be glad to do anything I can," replied Arnold, warmly.

Mr. Boyd led the way towards Edmund's room. "He is not now in bodily danger," he explained to Arnold, before entering, "but his mind is strangely weak. It has struck me that the strong influence which you exercised over him yesterday might be brought to bear in steadying his intellect."

"I think I understand," said Arnold, gravely. "I will try what I can do. You must check me if I do wrong."

Sissie's pale, anxious face looked wistfully at the young man as he drew near the bed, on the other side of which she was sitting.

"Here is Mr. Preston come to see you, Edmund," said the doctor.

"There now! You have frightened away the flies, and they were just in the midst of 'La Poule,' " cried Edmund.

"Won't you speak to Mr. Preston?" pursued the doctor.

"I don't know what you mean," said Edmund, with a smile so vacant that Arnold's heart ached for the anxious father and sister. At a motion from Mr. Boyd he went close up to Edmund.

"Edmund, look at me," he said.

Edmund looked, and then immediately looked away again, his eyes wandering incessantly round and round the room.

"No, don't look away. I want you to look steadily at me."

The boy looked, and did not look away so quickly as before.

"Now, who am I?"

"I don't know."

"Look again, then. Look at me as I look at you."

This time the wandering gaze fixed itself steadily on the clear brown eyes which were opposed to it.

"You are Beppo!" shrieked the boy, and began to tremble and sob.

"I am afraid I have done harm instead of good," said Arnold, as, at a sign from Mr. Boyd, Sissie hurried him into the next room.

"And yet he looked at you much more naturally than he has looked at any one else this morning," Sissie answered.

"I think our experiment has partially succeeded," said Mr. Boyd, coming into the room. "But we must not repeat it at present. The mind was settling very satisfactorily till that remembrance occurred. I am not sure that it was not well to stir that remembrance. Anything is better than apathy. However, we will certainly have another opinion. Good-day, Mr. Preston."

"It was very kind of you to come so quickly," said Sissie, as she went downstairs with Arnold.

"Not at all, Miss Monk. I should be glad to do anything much more difficult. I feel as if I were in some way to blame for all this misery."

"How did it happen?" asked Sissie. "I do not know yet how the gun went off."

"I hardly know. Your brother and I had been tramping about on the moor without hitting anything. I took my gun as an excuse for joining him, but I never shoot birds, and your brother shot very wide. The sun was terribly hot, and he looked so dead-beat that I got him into the copse as soon as I could. He did not seem much to notice where we were going. When we had been in the copse for some time, he began to complain that he had had no sport, and spoke of returning to the moor. I thought he wanted to shake me off, but I remembered my promise to you. Just then there was a rustling in the bushes, and I saw Beppo coming through. At the same in-

stant your brother fired, and Beppo fell. I don't know whether the gun went off by accident, or whether your brother mistook Beppo for a rabbit—he would hardly have shot at a tame rabbit, though. If he gave any explanation, I did not hear it, for I saw you on the other side of the hedge, and jumped over to save you from the shock of coming suddenly upon poor Beppo.”

“You have been very kind throughout all this, Mr. Preston,” observed Sissie.

“That is nonsense, Miss Monk. It was all quite simple. It is not kind to have done what one would be a monster not to have done.”

I think you have been *very* kind,” Sissie repeated, and as she looked at him with her sad, weary eyes, the young man gave a great gulp, and coloured deeply.

“I wish I could do something really kind for you,” he muttered, as he ran down the steps.

In the park he met Walter Bligh. "Pray go and comfort that poor girl, Mr. Bligh," he said. "It breaks my heart to see her so broken down,—so different to what she was the day I first saw her on the old tower."

If sympathy could have helped Sissie in her trouble, she had plenty of sympathy. Daily and hourly inquiries were made after Edmund's health, and the whole neighbourhood seemed to be infected with the gloom which had fallen upon Monk's Own. The doctors who were summoned, first from Scarborough and York, and then from London and Edinburgh, could do no more than Mr. Boyd had done—leave the case in the hands of that skilful physician, Time. Edmund's bodily health was soon perfectly re-established,—indeed, he grew stronger than he had ever been before; his slight form became muscular and robust, his face filled out, and his complexion changed from

pale to ruddy. But the once bright, earnest eyes were dull and restless, the intelligent smile had become quite vacant, the expressive countenance was now a meaningless blank. The friends of the family, in their kindness, tried to ignore the alteration, and to treat Edmund as though he were the same as ever. But Sissie would not suffer this. She could not bear that Edmund should be seen by any one, and would have liked to shut herself up with him, and to have excluded all visitors. Her nerves had received a shock from which they could not recover, and in proportion as her health began to fail, her mind yielded to the doubt which had so fatally affected poor Edmund. A still more painful significance was given to this doubt by a circumstance which occurred during Edmund's illness.

"Look here, Sissie; will you help me to put this seal into my book? It is such a

pretty one, and it is not broken a bit," said little Clement one day.

"Where did you get this piece of paper, Clem?" asked Sissie, when she had looked at the seal.

"I found it in papa's room, the day Edmund was so ill. It fell on the ground when papa put his papers away, and I thought I might have the seal."

The piece of paper was the flap of a letter—part of which had been torn off with the large wax impression which Clement coveted. The Monk crest was on the seal, and the few words which caught Sissie's eye were signed with the name, "Henry Monk." Miss Colquhoun's account of Sir John Monk's conduct to his second son had greatly excited the interest of both Edmund and Sissie, and the impression had been deepened by the subsequent doubt as to whether this neglected son might not have left a child, who could claim the estate.

This made Sissie attach an importance to Clement's acquisition which she would not have attached to it in any other case. As soon as she had made out the signature, not quickly legible, she carefully refrained from reading more, and, with some inward trepidation, carried the seal to her father.

"Clement found this seal in your room, papa. There is a piece of a letter torn off with it, and I thought perhaps it might be of consequence."

Sir Percy glanced carelessly at the paper, but he no sooner caught sight of the very peculiar writing, than he snatched it hastily from Sissie's hand, and with an alarming change in colour and countenance, exclaimed, "What business has that child with my private papers? Tell him I will flog him if he meddles with them again!"

Sir Percy walked angrily from the room, and left Sissie to console Clement for the

loss of his seal, and to brood over the doubts which her father's behaviour had so greatly increased.

There were two persons, however, whose visits at this time were always welcome to Sissie. The one was little Lottia, whose entire innocence of any change in Edmund was an unspeakable comfort to his sister, and whose childish interests seemed just sufficient to call forth the poor boy's faculties, without straining them beyond their power. The other person whose presence always had a good effect on Edmund, and was, therefore, always welcome to Sissie, was Arnold Preston. In his most wayward moods Edmund was docile with him, and Arnold could call out flashes of intelligence which sometimes inspired the hope that the boy's mind was not destroyed, but only dormant. This partial awakening of the intellect was, however, generally followed by a reaction into more entire imbecility, as

soon as the awakening influence was withdrawn.

Sissie had not yet been able to make up her mind to leave Edmund for so long a time as must be spent on a visit to the new comers at Kirklands, so she was rather surprised when she was walking with her brother in the park, one wintry afternoon, to see the Prestons' pretty open carriage driven up to the door, and the occupants of it enter the house. In a few minutes Arnold came out again, and advanced rapidly towards her.

"You need not say that you are glad to see us, Miss Monk, because I know that you are not," he said. "But if you want to do a very kind action, you will come in and see my mother. My father cannot be made to comprehend the rules of etiquette, and for weeks he has been scolding my mother for not coming to see you, instead of waiting for you to come and see her. My poor

mother has a most praiseworthy dread of Mrs. Grundy, but my father's will is more potent even than Mrs. Grundy's, so mamma has come in fear and trembling, and she will continue to tremble until you assure her with your own lips that you forgive her this breach of decorum."

Long before Arnold had finished speaking Sissie had moved towards the house, and the last words were said as they passed through the hall. A pretty, fair, timid-looking little woman came forward as they entered the drawing-room, and taking Sissie's hand, said, with considerable grace of manner, "Now that I see Miss Monk, I am no longer afraid that she will not forgive our intrusion."

"My missus had a fancy that we must sit moping at home, and mustn't pay a neighbourly visit, till you and your good father came and looked us up. But, says I, they have got other things to think of than

going trapesing over the country paying visits, so you just get on your bonnet, and we'll go over there in a friendly way, and say 'How do you do?' Lord bless your soul! If they don't like us, they needn't let us in a second time! That's what I said, Miss Monk, and I say the same to you. Here we are! A plain couple enough,—not that my wife here isn't as good a lady as the best of you,—but I don't make any pretensions to the gentleman myself; and those that can't shake hands with an honest working man, had better leave my hand alone." With these words a huge hand was presented to Sissie, who shook it with hearty good-will, looking at the same time, with some surprise, but more satisfaction, at her plain-spoken visitor,—an immense man of about forty-five, with a round face; to which an entire absence of beard and whiskers, and a pink and white complexion, gave a ludicrously childish appearance.

It impressed Sissie very favourably towards the whole party to observe that neither the wife nor the son, both of whom were unusually refined in appearance and manner, looked in the least ashamed of the "working man;" and that the supercilious tone, which had struck her so much when she first saw Arnold, was entirely absent when he spoke to his father. The elder man's evident pride in his son, was another thing which spoke volumes in favour of both. When Sissie tried to say something of her obligations to Arnold for all his kindness, Mr. Preston cried out, "My dear Miss Monk! You might as well thank this boy for breathing as for being kind! He can't help it. He sucked it in with his mother's milk, and he can't choose but give it out again whenever there's a chance." As he spoke, the enthusiastic giant stretched out his hand to his son, who grasped it warmly, saying at the same

time to Sissie, "Before you see any more of us, Miss Monk, I must warn you that my father and mother are utterly insane on one point, and that is myself. In all other respects they are very sensible people, especially my father."

As a reward for this praise, the young man, who had just risen to meet Sir Percy, received such a slap on the back that he staggered forward, and almost fell into Sir Percy's arms.

Sissie had not, since the Cover-heath days, seen her father so much at his ease with any one as he soon became with his unpretending neighbour. Sir Percy had great discernment in character, and anything unreal was, therefore, at once detected, and at once despised by him. Such thorough reality as Mr. Preston's gave him positive enjoyment, and so drew out all his best feelings, that the pleasurable impression was mutual, and the new neighbours parted with

a sincere desire to be good friends—much to the delight of Arnold, who ever since his first arrival at Kirklands had been longing to make his father and mother share in his great admiration of Sir Percy, and his something more than admiration of Sissie.

CHAPTER X.

THE day after the Prestons' visit Miss Colquhoun arrived for a long-promised stay at Monk's Own. During Lady Monk's life, her precarious health and capricious temper had interfered with all exercise of hospitality, and although Sir Percy's old friend had been frequently with the Rupert Monks, she had never been invited to the Tower—as Monk's Own was commonly called. Now Sir Percy was very glad to secure for Sissie a few months of sensible and bright companionship, and it had been settled that Miss Colquhoun should divide her time between Monk's Own and Monk's Kirk Rectory, until the beginning of the London

season, when Sissie was to be introduced into the gay world under the auspices of this judicious friend.

Although Miss Colquhoun knew nothing of the nature of that secret burden under which Sissie was labouring, and under which Edmund had been crushed, her keen penetration at once discovered that a burden of some nature lay on Sissie's mind, and all her energies were devoted to the task of lightening it. A few preliminary inquiries and observations were, however, necessary before commencing this work.

"What is the matter with Sissie Monk, Dr. Bligh?" she asked of the rector, two days after her arrival.

"She does not look well, does she, poor child? I am afraid she has taken Edmund's state very much to heart."

"That is not all; there is something more than that on her mind."

"Is there? Well, if you say so, Harriet,

of course it is so. And you are the woman to find out what it is. I have seen very little of the poor child lately, as she has shut herself up with Edmund. Lucy might be able to answer your question. The two are very thick."

"Then if Lucy knows she would not tell."

"Ten to one it is some love affair—children of that age are very subject to those complaints, I find."

"Who is there?"

"Well, there's Stephen Rice. According to his own account, all the girls are in love with him. And there's another young fellow—much more dangerous, to my mind—young Preston, up at Kirklands."

"A gentleman?"

"Yes, decidedly. His father's a rough old chap—about as rough as I am—but the son is almost as mealy-mouthed as Walter."

"There is Walter, too: could there be anything between him and Sissie?"

"There has been a good deal of tutoring between them—great nonsense, I think: what does a girl want of Latin and elocution?"

"Tutoring is generally considered rather dangerous work. I must have a little talk with Walter."

All the important part of this "little talk" was contained in these words:

"I wonder you are still a bachelor, Walter. A clergyman needs a wife."

"Suppose a clergyman cannot get a wife, Harriet?"

"I have heard that he always can, if he tries."

"Perhaps so; if he try for *a* wife, not *the* wife."

"Then you have set your heart on *the* wife. I think if I were a young man living at Monk's Kirk, I should find it rather an

embarras de richesses. But certainly, as two of the girls are your own nieces, *your* choice is not so large."

"To whom should you give the palm, Harriet?" asked Walter, looking rather foolish. "Being as you are, not a young man, but a most discerning young woman."

"Young! H'm! But we will let that pass as a necessary practice in your professional duties. I can fancy little Lucy being very captivating to men; but, for myself, I think no one is to be compared to Sissie Monk."

As she spoke, Harriet Colquhoun looked full in Walter's face. But she saw no glow of gratification, rather an air of disappointment, as he answered, "Sissie is a dear, good girl, and it is quite a public calamity to have her so unlike herself as she is at present."

"I suppose she is unhappy about poor Edmund."

"Yes. She was quite inconsolable for some time, but Wilfred says she is in better spirits now."

"Wilfred cannot be so intimate with Sissie as yourself."

"No, he is a comparative stranger to her. But, do you know, Harriet, Wilfred ought to be in my place. He is just fit for a clergyman, he has so much tact and penetration; whilst I, unfortunately, have none."

Miss Colquhoun's next attack was made more in public, at a little dance given at the Rectory, to celebrate Lucy's seventeenth birthday. Sissie could not refuse to be present on such an occasion, so she had left Edmund with his father, and had so far succeeded in shaking off her cares that she looked almost like her old self.

Miss Colquhoun did not dance, and whilst making herself agreeable to every one, she managed to use her eyes and ears to good purpose. As she entered the room with

Sissie, she noticed that Stephen Rice—who was engaged in examining the curl of his whiskers, with the help of two glasses so placed as to reflect each other—immediately desisted from his interesting occupation, and made his way towards Sissie. Another significant fact was that Arnold Preston, who was just standing up to dance with Sophie Rice, looked at Sissie instead of at his partner, and became so rudely inattentive to Sophie's observations, that for the remainder of the quadrille she addressed all her conversation to Wilfred Bligh, who was opposite to her.

Sissie received Stephen's advance with perfect indifference.

"If I had dared to hope that there was the least chance of seeing you to-night, Miss Monk, I would have taken care to secure one or two dances, by engaging them beforehand," Stephen said.

"There was no necessity for taking so much trouble," Sissie answered. "I have

no engagements, and I shall be very glad to dance with you once, or twice if you wish it."

"Will you dance with me now?—this first dance?"

"No. I always keep the first dance for Uncle Walter—if he wants it," smiling at Walter, who just then came up.

"Of course I want it, Sissie," answered Walter, not quite so gratefully as he should have spoken, and with a look at Sophie Rice and his brother which plainly told Miss Colquhoun who was *the* wife for him.

"Poor Uncle Walter!" remarked Lucy, who was standing by, and had seen the look, and Miss Colquhoun's observation of it.

"Is that so?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"Nasty little flirt! I hate her!" exclaimed Lucy, with considerable energy, tossing up her pretty head as she spoke.

"Oh, oh! Miss Lucy!" thought Miss

Colquhoun, and mentally added a fourth to the three discoveries she had made.

At this moment Stephen Rice came up. "What!" he exclaimed, "the heroine of the night not dancing! Come, Lucy, let us stand up together."

"No, thank you, Mr. Rice, I don't wish to dance this time;" and Lucy turned away rather ungraciously.

"Is Sophie flirting with her present partner?" Miss Colquhoun asked the girl when Stephen had moved away.

"She flirts with every one," answered Lucy.

"But she seems to pay much more attention to your Uncle Wilfred."

"Only to pique Mr. Preston."

"That is trouble thrown away, I should imagine. Mr. Preston looks supremely indifferent."

"Do you think so, Aunt Harriet?" exclaimed Lucy, in an eager tone.

"Decidedly. He is as inattentive as he could be, without being positively rude."

"But she is so fascinating, he cannot be indifferent to her," said Lucy, wistfully.

"How does he look now, Lucy?" asked Miss Colquhoun, as Arnold and his partner approached them, in walking about after the dance was ended—Sophie bestowing the sweetest smiles and glances upon Arnold, whilst he was looking over her head across the room.

As they were passing Lucy, Arnold stopped. "Miss Monk," he said, "will you keep a dance for me, as early as I have any right to ask it?"

"The next, if you like," answered Lucy, with a beaming face.

"That is very kind, and I should be very ungrateful if I did not like it."

"I hope you do not object to a silent partner, Lucy," said Sophie, looking reproachfully at Arnold.

"I am afraid you found me very objectionable, Miss Rice," returned Arnold, coldly. "I must plead guilty to having been rude enough to let my mind be preoccupied, even when you were doing me the honour to talk to me."

"Is *your* mind preoccupied, Captain Bligh?" asked Sophie, as Wilfred came up to her. "If so, I shall decline fulfilling my engagement, as I prefer a partner who listens when I speak."

"My mind is always preoccupied—but it is with yourself," returned Captain Bligh, in low, tender tones, which were intended for no ears but Sophie's, but which were plainly audible to Harriet, as she sat behind Sophie.

"Will you take me into the other room, Captain Bligh? It is so very hot here;" and, exchanging Arnold's arm for Wilfred's, Sophie walked off, with a resentful glance at her late partner.

Arnold laughed as he seated himself on a vacant chair beside Lucy, a little in front of Miss Colquhoun. "Is Miss Sophie Rice a very dear friend of yours?" he asked the former.

"A very old friend, but not very dear. I have only one very dear friend."

"And that is Miss Monk of Monk's Own. I honour you for your choice of a friend," said Arnold, with rather more fervour than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Why did you ask about Sophie Rice?" asked Lucy, after a somewhat constrained silence.

"Because I want some one to tell me what I am to think of her; and if she were your very dear friend you would not tell me truly."

"Cannot you think, without being told what to think?"

"Yes. But having known her so short a time, I may think wrong. Is

she a friend of Miss Monk—Miss Sissie Monk?"

"No. I don't think Sophie likes Sissie. Sissie admires her very much, but they are not friends—not intimate friends, I mean."

"Some one would like them to be sisters-in-law, I fancy."

"You mean Stephen Rice? He is very fond of Sissie."

"And she?" asked Arnold, with a tone in his voice which betrayed *his* feelings to Miss Colquhoun as plainly as Walter's had been betrayed by a glance.

"She is such a strange girl! She does not understand that sort of thing," returned Lucy, innocently.

"By 'that sort of thing,' you mean people being fond of her?"

"Yes," answered Lucy. "She is quite different to most girls."

"Quite different to Miss Sophie Rice, for

instance," said Arnold, with his somewhat contemptuous laugh.

"What do you really think of Sophie, Mr. Preston?" asked Lucy.

"I think she is a scoundrel," returned Arnold, "if I may be allowed to apply such a word to a lady."

"Some people like her very much," remarked Lucy.

"Your two uncles, for instance. And that is what makes me call her a scoundrel. If I had nothing else to do, I would undertake to open their eyes to her true character."

"How would you do it?"

"I would pretend to be as much her slave as they are, and in the pursuit of a new conquest she would neglect the old ones."

"But you would not do that, it would be so wicked," said Lucy, in her childish manner.

"Very wicked to do so with any one but

a coquette—a coquette, however, is fair game. Now let us have our dance.”

The seats vacated by this couple were soon occupied by another, Sissie and Stephen Rice. “It is hardly fair to be tired so soon, Miss Monk,” said Stephen, as Sissie sat down.

“Do find another partner, Mr. Rice, for I cannot dance any more just now.”

“You ought to know by this time that I care to dance with no one but yourself.”

“I am very sorry for that,” answered Sissie, “for I don’t care about dancing at all. There is Laura sitting down,” she added, “and she waltzes better than any one else in the room. You had much better go and ask her.”

“I had much rather remain with you,” pleaded Stephen.

“If I ask you as a favour to waltz with Laura?”

“If you were to ask me as a favour to

cut my throat, I should be only too happy to please you," said Stephen, bombastically, as he rose and crossed the room.

"Miss Colquhoun," said Sissie, when he was gone, "do call Uncle Walter here ; see how utterly wretched he looks."

Miss Colquhoun beckoned, and Walter, with a faint smile, was preparing to obey the summons, when Sophie Rice, leaning on his brother's arm, interrupted his progress. The two observers saw that Walter's face grew gradually brighter, whilst Wilfred's became overcast ; and that presently Sophie dropped the arm of the one, and took that of the other, walking away with Walter, whilst Wilfred came forward and sat down on the chair beside Sissie.

"You look tired, Captain Bligh," said Sissie, kindly.

"Yes. This sort of thing does not suit me," he answered, in a weary, despondent tone. "I feel utterly out of my element.

But I beg your pardon," he added, "perhaps you would like to join this dance? Will you take me for a partner?"

"I should like to dance with you," said Sissie, with her usual frank cordiality, "but I must not this time, for I have refused Mr. Rice."

At this moment Arnold and Lucy came up, and Arnold held out his hand to Sissie, saying, "I have been trying to get an opportunity of telling you how very glad I am to see you here to-night, Miss Monk. Perhaps I have no right to say so, having known you so short a time."

"I never feel as if it were a short time," answered Sissie.

"Nor I," said Arnold, looking intensely gratified. "I feel as if we were very old friends indeed. Let us make a decree that it shall be so. Let us snap our fingers at old Father Time's facts, and put back the date of our first acquaintance fifteen years.

I suppose we must get Captain Bligh's consent, as he was the means of our first becoming acquainted."

"I will most willingly give it," returned Wilfred, "if, at the same time, you will put my age back fifteen years."

"You would not really wish that, Uncle Wilfred?" exclaimed Sissie.

"Should not you think much more of me if I were a fine young fellow of eighteen?" asked Wilfred, with a melancholy smile.

"No, certainly not. Should you, Lucy?"

"Yes," answered Lucy, demurely, "I think perhaps I should."

"Most young ladies would, I believe," said Captain Bligh.

"I don't think *I am* a young lady," remarked Sissie. "I never think or feel as I am expected to think and feel."

"Now will you reward me?" whispered Stephen Rice, coming behind Sissie's chair.

"Uncle Wilfred, did not you ask me to

dance with you?" was Sissie's mode of answering the question, and she moved off with Captain Bligh. Stephen turned angrily on his heel. Arnold looked after the departing couple with an air of vexation.

"I would give something for the years your uncle is so anxious to get rid of," he said. "They give a man an immense advantage."

Lucy looked hurt. *She* had confessed her preference for a younger man.

"Will you make me acquainted with Mr. Preston, Lucy," said Miss Colquhoun, leaning forward, "I want to talk to him about Kirklands." Kirklands had formerly been Harriet Colquhoun's home.

The talk about Kirklands soon grew into talk about Monk's Own, and quite confirmed Miss Colquhoun's suspicion of Arnold's feeling for Sissie. When, however, an hour later, she found Sissie in the smaller room, playing at whist with the Rector, Mrs.

Rupert Monk, and Mr. Rice, she felt sure that it was no love-affair which weighed on the girl's spirits, though Arnold was sitting in a corner, looking very sentimentally at Sissie's back, and Stephen Rice was standing at the doorway with a sullen countenance.

As Harriet Colquhoun was leaving the card-room, Sophie came up and took her brother's arm. A few low-spoken words passed between them, and then they walked together to where Arnold was sitting. Harriet could not refrain from drawing near enough to listen.

"Mr. Preston," said Sophie, with the most charming air of penitence and modesty combined, "I am afraid I was very rude to you just now. I have not been at all happy since, and I shall not be happy until you say that you forgive me."

Arnold rose, and bowed ceremoniously, with a look on his expressive face which would have abashed any one but a coquette.

"I did not remember that you had been rude," he said; "but if it were the case, you only used the privilege of your sex."

"That is too indulgent of you. It cannot be any one's privilege to be rude," answered Sophie, in the same conciliatory tone.

"It is the privilege of all weak things freely to use the weapons with which they are provided. A cat may scratch a dog, and public opinion says nothing; but if the much-provoked dog uses *his* weapons, and shakes the cat, the world cries 'Fie upon him!'"

"I am afraid, if you ever marry, you and your wife will lead 'a cat-and-dog life,' Mr. Preston," remarked Sophie, exchanging softness for archness.

"I shall not marry a wife that scratches," returned Arnold, as little moved by this mode of attack as he had been by the former.

"And you call my little display of temper

"scratching?" asked Sophie, pathetically.

"I did not observe your little display of temper, Miss Rice. But you say you were rude, and I say you had a right to be rude."

"And you will not say you forgive me?"

"Oh, I will say that, if it is any satisfaction to you."

"I shall not feel forgiven whilst you speak in that tone," said Sophie, relapsing into the melting mood.

"How shall I speak? I forgive you. Will that do?" asked Arnold, having spoken with the most exaggerated sentimentality.

"Will you give me that flower as an assurance of it?" asked Sophie, laying her hand on a sprig of heath in Arnold's button-hole.

"Not that!" cried Arnold, hastily, and almost fiercely, colouring as he spoke. "I will give you *this* flower," and he picked up

a piece of scarlet geranium which had fallen on the floor, and presented it to her.

"A poor gift!" exclaimed Sophie, now at last with a slightly offended air. "You seem to value that heath very highly."

"I do," answered Arnold, gravely, involuntarily glancing at Sissie's gown, which was trimmed with sprays of a similar heath.

Stephen looked furious. "Come along, Sophie," he said. "I cannot stand here any longer, to listen to this folly."

When the whist was over, Arnold drew near to Sissie, and said, "I have just been asked why I value this heath so highly. Do you know why?"

Sissie looked perfectly unembarrassed as she replied, "I can give you a much better piece than that," and detached one of the sprays from her skirt.

"The Rector is quite wrong," thought Miss Colquhoun.

CHAPTER XI.

Lucy's birthday party was followed by a much grander entertainment at Kirklands. To this Sissie was invited in such a manner that it was impossible for her to refuse. Formal notes for Sir Percy, and Miss Monk, and Miss Colquhoun, had requested the pleasure of their company on the evening of Wednesday, the 23rd of December; but a few hours after these missives had been left at the door, Mr. Preston appeared.

"I am come to ask a great favour of you, Miss Monk," he said, as he entered the room where Sissie and Miss Colquhoun were sitting. "You have had some jiggermarrie notes from my wife, I suppose, to ask you

to a grand kick-up at our house. Well, it has struck me that you might be going to say 'No,' and I have come to say 'Don't.' I know you are not in good spirits, and all that sort of thing, and that you've every right to be excused if you are not inclined to be very sociable just now. But I can't look at you without being certain that you're a good-natured lass, and would do all you can to please another. Now this is how the matter stands. This sworry, as my man Jakes will have it—I call it a house-warming—is to be a treat to our boy on his twenty-first birthday. We are not going to call it his 'coming of age,' because, though, please God, I hope to leave him as well off as any of the swells, he doesn't want to, and I don't want him to set up for being anything but what he is. But you see, my dear, what we've set our hearts on is that the boy should enjoy his birthday, and so I've told him to spend as much as ever he likes, and to ask

all the friends he likes. I leave it all to him, for he knows what's what, and I don't. I know a good piece of iron when I see it, but, Lord bless your heart! I don't know what's the best kind of sworry. But now this is it, my dear. The boy may spend a power of money—and I hope he will; and he may get a house full of fine tolks—the more the merrier!—but if you stay away, I know he won't enjoy himself a bit. Why, bless you, my dear! you should have seen the fuss he made about that fal-lal of a letter to you. All the others his mother wrote might take care of themselves, and there was no fear *they* wouldn't go safe; but that one had to be read and read, and turned and twisted about, and, at last, delivered with his own hands, because no servant could be trusted with such a precious charge. Ha, ha! Now don't ye disappoint the poor lad, Miss Monk. Do ye come to his party. He is a good lad, I do assure

you, and he'll go to his school, or college, or whatever they call it, with twice the heart, if he isn't crossed just now."

"What college is your son at?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"There now, I can't recall the name; something to do with brass, I know it is. You must ask Arnbl'd; he can tell you. His name's been down to get in for the last three years; they told me it was the best place there for working, and I want the boy to work. He's got the making of a first-rater in him, and it shan't be lost for want of education, if I can help it. I gave him two years abroad after he left Rugby school, because I heard say they didn't teach the right sort of foreign languages at those big schools. He would have been to that college before this, if it hadn't been for going abroad. But I am glad that's over; I *did* miss the boy when he was away, and I had to take his mother after him. You

see, it was but natural, poor girl, that she should think more of him than of an old rusty file like me. Bless my heart! I have been gossiping here, and I shall have Arnold scenting me out; I promised to meet him on the moor at twelve. I've stole a march on him; he didn't know I was coming here. Now, my dear," taking Sissie's hand in a most paternal manner, "you'll say 'yes,' won't you?"

"Your son has been so kind to me that I must say 'yes' to anything he wishes," replied Sissie, gravely, not perceiving, as Miss Colquhoun did, what interpretation of her words caused Mr. Preston to indulge in a series of triumphant chuckles, in the midst of which he left the room, looking in again, however, to say, with a nod and a broad grin at Miss Colquhoun, "You'll come too, ma'am?"

"Yes, I hope to have that pleasure, as you are kind enough to wish to see me."

"Not I ma'am. I shall not see you. I

shall take care to keep out of the way. Why, bless your good heart! I should spoil it all. What should I look like at a sworry? Jakes himself would laugh at me. No, no. The boy'll have some of his school friends—great swells in their way—and he shan't need to be ashamed of anything they'll see in *his* home."

"Your son surely would not be ashamed," began Miss Colquhoun.

"Of me, ma'am? That is just the one point on which we fall out. I say I won't show before his friends, and he says he won't have any friends that I won't show before. He says he wouldn't be ashamed of his home if it was a hovel, and I was twice as unlike a gentleman as I am. I love the boy for his spirit, but he's in the wrong for all that. It stands to reason that those that haven't got any education ain't fit company for them that have. But don't you tell Arnold I shan't be at the sworry. I mean to give

him the slip. It's as likely as not he'd say if I didn't show, he wouldn't. I shall have very particular business at Dorlington ;" and with another grin, and a delighted wink, Mr. Preston again disappeared.

Although it was certain that no expense had been spared in preparing for the party at Kirklands, there was an entire absence of ostentation, and Miss Colquhoun, who was perhaps the best judge present, decided that she had never seen anything in better taste than the whole arrangement. Mr. Preston was true to his word, and was "unavoidably absent." Arnold performed the part of host with the tact and self-possession of a much older man, calling forth from Stephen Rice the remark to his sister, that "That puppy gives himself the airs of a prince."

Stephen's temper was not proof against the trial of seeing his rival—as he considered Arnold—with such external advantages as surrounded him this evening. No girl, he

thought, could help being influenced by this display of wealth and good taste combined. It was some consolation to him that the duties of hospitality obliged Arnold, during all the earlier part of the evening, to devote himself entirely to those who would not otherwise have received any attention. But even the duties of hospitality do not demand an utter sacrifice of self, and after supper, when most of the dowagers had departed, and the unattractive girls had had as much notice as they could hope for, Arnold indemnified himself for his former self-denial by monopolizing Sissie for every dance.

Sissie, remembering Mr. Preston's pathetic appeal to her not to "cross the boy," and having now a cordial liking for Arnold, was quite willing to be monopolized, however scandalized society might be at the proceeding.

"As we have settled to be old friends,"

Arnold said, "it does not signify how much we dance together, and we need not mind that fellow's scowls. That is, if you don't mind."

"Stephen Rice, do you mean? He is in a very bad temper to-night. But he is not really so disagreeable as he has sometimes appeared lately."

"You don't like him, do you?" asked Arnold, hastily.

"Yes, I do. He is very good-natured, and he can be very amusing when he likes."

"Is that all you like people for?"

"I like people more who are something more than good-natured and amusing; but it would be absurd to dislike everybody who was not something more than that."

"Do you ever like people because they like you?"

"I don't know. No, I don't think I do. I dislike some people who like me—or say they do."

"Do you know, Miss Monk, I believe you have the hardest heart of any one I ever met with. No, I don't mean that quite. I think in some things you are very tender-hearted, but you are so terribly cool about other people's feelings."

"Am I?" asked Sissie, innocently. "I don't mean to be. It is because I am so dense. I have no imagination. I never can foresee what will hurt people's feelings."

As Sissie looked frankly into Arnold's face, there was something in the earnest gaze fixed upon her which suddenly recalled to her mind poor Edmund's cry, "You are Beppo!" and for the first time she understood that those soft and yet deep eyes had reminded Edmund of the faithful and loving friend that he had killed.

"Do you know," said Arnold, "that a very slight change in your name would make it much more applicable. You need only change the first *i* into *u*, and take

away the second *i*, and then in German it would be *Süsse*."

"That is 'sweet,' is it not?" asked Sissie, innocently, and then, for the first time in her life perhaps, she coloured consciously as she met Arnold's eye.

"You do not know my real name," she said.

"Don't say that it is Cecilia."

"It is worse. It is Alexandrina."

Arnold gave a look of comical surprise.

"Alexander was a great man," he said.

"The Alexander after whom I am named was greater than he."

"Indeed!"

"He was the most unselfish, the most affectionate, and the most simple-minded man that ever lived."

"Are those all the qualities you think essential to greatness?"

"Yes. What qualities can be greater?"

"Honesty—I should add to the list."

A sudden remembrance made Sissie colour, and then turn pale.

"Grandpapa was very honest," she said, in a low voice.

"I do not doubt it. Was he your father's father—the last baronet?"

"Sir John was not papa's father. Papa's father was Sir John's cousin. The grandfather I mean was mamma's father. Papa's father and mother both died when he was a child."

"How curious that you and I should both be named after our mothers' fathers!"

"Were you? I thought perhaps you had been named after Dr. Arnold, of Rugby."

"No. I was not so fortunate as you in bearing the name of *my* 'greatest man.' I never saw the grandfather after whom I was called. I have seen his grave, and his house—in Switzerland: he was a Swiss. You will dance again with me, will you not? I cannot do any more duty dances."

As they took their places in the country-dance which was forming, Arnold said: "I am so glad to know Miss Rice is not a particular friend of yours."

"Why?" asked Sissie, in surprise.

"She is playing false with those two men."

"Which men?"

"The Blighs. And they are both good fellows. It is a crying shame! She will end by setting them against each other, and when the captain first came home they were such capital friends. It was a sad day for him when his ship was paid off, as not seaworthy. The sooner he gets another, the better. He will do no good on shore."

"How do you know that Sophie is playing false?"

"I have watched her. If there is one thing I abominate it is a flirt—male or female. I don't think I could ever forgive a woman who made a fool of me."

When the country-dance was ended there was a general move towards departure. Arnold would not separate from Sissie whilst she said "good-night" to his mother and other friends, and he kept her hand imprisoned by his arm till they reached the stairs leading up to the bedrooms—Miss Colquhoun having gone on before with the Rupert Monks. Arnold was silent as they crossed the hall, and there was something in his manner which made it impossible for Sissie to be as much at her ease as usual—so she, also, was silent. At the foot of the stairs her imprisoned hand was taken in Arnold's other hand, and held in a firm clasp, whilst he said: "Mind you wrap yourself up well. It is a bitterly cold night." Then, as Sissie tried to escape, he exclaimed passionately, leaning forward, and drawing her hand still closer to himself, "Six months ago I did not know of your existence! And now, Süssie, I cannot tell

you all you are to me !” Pressing his lips suddenly on to her white glove, he let her go, and as she ran upstairs, a sneering voice behind said :

“Have we to congratulate you, Mr. Preston ?”

“To congratulate me on what, Mr. Rice ?”

“I do not know what may be the custom in the manufacturing towns, but in these country parts it is not usual for a lady and gentleman to dance together all the evening, unless they are engaged.”

Arnold drew himself up with all the dignity of a much taller man than he really was, and flashed a brilliant glance of scorn at his little adversary. “You wish to know if I am engaged to Miss Monk ?” he said, with studied politeness, in a voice of which the sweetness struck even Stephen’s coarse ear. “You will understand that I could not importune her on the subject whilst she was my guest, but it will not be my

fault if we are not engaged before to-morrow evening."

With these words Arnold turned away to examine into the truth of some reports as to the state of the weather, and Stephen muttered to himself, "Confound the fellow! He is not so bad-looking after all!"

The reports which had been brought in were only too well founded, and when the ladies came down ready to depart, they were met with the intelligence that it was extremely doubtful whether any departure was practicable. As they all stood in the hall, the door opened, and a tall black and white figure appeared.

"I have come to see if I can be of any use," said the voice of Walter Bligh, who had stayed away from the party on conscientious grounds. "No one can possibly drive," he added. "On the level roads the snow is a foot deep, and between here and Monk's Kirk it has drifted so much, that in

many places it was up to my knees. My sister and Lottie were home before the heaviest fall, but they had to go at a snail's pace all the way—the snow kept balling so in the horses' hoofs."

"It is quite out of the question to think of reaching Monk's Own," remarked Arnold, turning with a delighted face to Sissie.

"I think every one would do much better to stay here for the night," said Mrs. Preston; and the graceful little figure glided from one to the other of the guests, pressing them to remain, in a sweet, winning manner, and with the pretty, slightly imperfect speech, which Sissie now knew to be the result of foreign birth, not of low breeding, as the Rices had said.

It was at last decided that all the Monk's Kirk party should walk there in a body, being provided with extra wraps by Mrs. Preston, and with over-shoes and boots by Arnold and the butler. Lucy Monk, in a

pair of Mr. Preston's Wellington boots, was a sight not soon to be forgotten—the comicality of the figure being heightened by a grave, sad little face.

As this group, which Walter compared to a party of Lapps on a winter excursion, was just ready to start, the hall door opened again, and Sir Percy walked in. “Are my ladies amongst this motley crowd?” he asked of Arnold, who stood foremost.

“No, Sir Percy. They have very sensibly agreed to remain here till the roads are more passable.”

“Quite right! I came to say that they must on no account think of venturing beyond Monk's Kirk to-night. I have been three hours coming from Monk's Own. I will not come in. I should chill you all. You look famously bright and warm in there. Good-night, Harriet! Good-night, Sissie! No, I must not stay. I cannot leave my boys.”

"I shall go with your father," said Arnold to Sissie, popping his head in at the drawing-room door.

When the rest went out, Stephen Rice returned to the drawing-room. "You will not be able to get all your unexpected guests settled for the night just yet, Mrs. Preston," he said; "so if you will allow me, I will remain a few minutes longer. I shall overtake my sisters before they get beyond Monk's Kirk."

As it was true that the fifteen unexpected guests could not be provided with beds without some delay, there being already eighteen visitors staying in the house—an attempt was made at recommencing some amusement, and two sisters sat down to play a duet. Under cover of the music, Stephen immediately began: "I must take this opportunity of speaking to you, Miss Monk. I can no longer bear in silence the change in your manner to me. Ever since you first

came to Monk's Own, I have wished you to perceive that my feelings towards you are of no common nature. At one time I thought you were aware of it, but latterly you have treated me with a coldness and reserve which I can only attribute to your having conceived the idea that my former attentions to you had no serious meaning."

"On the contrary, Mr. Rice," returned Sissie, without a shade of embarrassment, "it is because I have fancied, or rather have been warned by others, that your attentions *had* a serious meaning, that my manner to you has lately changed."

"I do not understand," said Stephen, as Sissie stopped, thinking she had given him his answer.

"Having always liked your society," Sissie continued, "I never thought of there being any harm in showing that I liked it. But if I have led you into a mistake, I am very sorry."

"Do you wish me to understand then, Miss Monk, that I was mistaken in thinking that my attentions were agreeable to you—which your manner certainly led me to think."

"I am very sorry. It was extremely thoughtless and wrong in me. Will you forgive me, Mr. Rice, and let us forget that this mistake was ever made?"

Stephen pondered deeply for a few minutes. Then, with a suddenly clearing face, he asked, "Is it possible that you fancy my views are not disinterested, and that it is not yourself, but your fortune and your position, which attract me? Believe me, dearest Miss Monk—dearest Sissie, let me say—if the devotion of a lifetime will convince you, you shall be convinced that your fortune and position are but as drawbacks when compared to the—to the——"

"Indeed, Mr. Rice," interrupted Sissie,

"I never for one moment thought you were influenced by anything but a liking for myself. I hope you will be able very soon to get over that—or to like some one else better—for I never could care for you as I must care for my husband."

"That is very remarkable," said Stephen, and pondered a little more. Presently another bright idea occurred to him. "Your affections were probably engaged before you came to this neighbourhood," he said.

"No, certainly not. My affections were and are entirely free. Did it never occur to you, Mr. Rice, that it is sometimes impossible to give liking for liking?"

"Certainly. I have often experienced that in my own case. But in this case—you are the first lady to whom I have ever made a proposal of marriage—it is inconceivable to me that it should be made in vain."

"It is the case, however, I can assure you," answered Sissie, coldly.

"You cannot surely prefer that fellow Preston?"

"Certainly, I prefer Mr. Preston," said Sissie, decisively—indignation having now taken the place of the amusement at Stephen's undisguised vanity which had soon succeeded to her first feelings of regret at his disappointment.

"That is," said Stephen, with a sneer, "you prefer Kirklands to the Hermitage."

"I prefer sense, and manliness, and good feeling to"—"vanity, and presumption, and self-conceit," Sissie would have added, but she stopped herself in time; and seeing some of the ladies preparing to go to their rooms, she hastily wished Stephen "good-night," and joined Miss Colquhoun.

Stephen had done such good service to

Arnold, that Sissie could not sleep for thinking of his long and toilsome walk—undertaken for her sake—and the first streak of morning light found her watching at her window for his return.

CHAPTER XII.

SISSIE had ceased her watch, and was dressing herself in a gown of Mrs. Preston's, several inches too short for her, when the maid entered with a valise containing all that was necessary for her morning toilette. "And Mr. Arnold says I am to tell you all is well at Monk's Own, miss, and Sir Percy got over very comfortable." Sissie was also apprised that another valise had been brought for Miss Colquhoun.

The party had only just assembled at breakfast when Arnold made his appearance.

"My dear boy, how tired you must be!"

cried Mrs. Preston, as he entered the room. "You ought not to have come back so soon."

"I could not stay away longer," Arnold returned, with a glance at Sissie. "Sir Percy made me go in and have some toddy and a cigar," he added. "It was half-past six when we got to Monk's Own, and I started back with Sargentson at about seven. The other poor fellow was quite knocked up by the walk. Sir Percy bore it much better. We were three hours and a half going, but only two hours getting back; it was comparatively easy work after it grew light. The boys were all comfortably asleep"—addressing himself especially to Sissie—"I went to see them, that I might give a satisfactory report. What a pretty little fellow Clement is!"

"You must be dead beat, Preston," remarked one of the Rugbeans.

"Not a bit of it. I am fresher than you

are, Hurst. There is nothing like a good walk to pick one up after a dance."

"I should say a seven miles' walk in deep snow was rather a kill or cure prescription," observed another of the guests.

"Especially with a portmanteau on your shoulder, as I saw you had as you came up the drive," remarked Miss Colquhoun.

"It was that portmanteau got me over the ground so well," returned Arnold, laughing. "That made the difference between going and returning."

"Is it Sissie or I who have to thank you?"

"It is Miss Monk whom *I* have to thank for the pleasure of carrying her belongings."

Soon after breakfast the greater number of the guests dispersed, all, with the exception of a few family friends who were to remain at Kirklands, being anxious to get home for Christmas. Sissie and Miss Colquhoun being quite determined on reaching

Monk's Own in the course of the day, Arnold busied himself in having two arm-chairs converted into *chaises-à-porteurs*, in which the two ladies could be carried without any fatigue or exposure. Whilst they were taking an early luncheon before starting, Mr. Preston arrived.

"I am so glad you have got back, John," exclaimed his wife, as the amiable giant's round face appeared at the door. "I was so afraid you might not get here by to-morrow."

"No difficulty in that, my lass," giving her a sounding kiss as he spoke.

"Then there has not been so much snow between here and Dorlington?" asked Arnold.

"There is plenty between here and Cheddle, that is all I know," returned Mr. Preston, with a wink at Sissie.

"Cheddle!" cried Arnold. "Did you come round by Cheddle?"

"I came *from* Cheddle," replied the delighted manœuvrer, with a chuckle.

"Have not you been to Dorlington?" asked Mrs. Preston.

"Not I, old woman. Cheddle was quite far enough for my purpose."

Arnold evidently began to suspect something. He looked inquiringly at Sissie, whose secret understanding with his father was betrayed by the latter's ostentatious winks and nods. Sissie shook her head, and laughed, in answer to the mute inquiry.

"Well, and how did the sworry go off?" asked Mr. Preston, rubbing his huge hands.

"Excellently," returned Arnold. "But if you were only at Cheddle, sir, why could you not——"

"Have been here?" interrupted the father.

"Ha, ha, ha! That our friends might have said, 'The sworry was all very well; and the house is monstrous fine and gimcracky; and the missus looks in her right place; and the

son is quite the gentleman; but what the dickens does that old clodhopper do amongst it all?"

"Father!" exclaimed Arnold, in a tone of unconcealed vexation and reproach. "That was not fair! You kept away on purpose, and led me into acting and telling a lie!"

"If you never tell a worse lie than that, my boy, it won't hurt you."

"A worse lie! What could be worse than for my mother and me to be telling people that you were 'unavoidably absent,' when you were only in hiding a few miles off? And to be giving an entertainment which drove you away from your own house!"

"Softly, my boy, softly!" said Mr. Preston, a little discomfited by Arnold's warmth, and patting his son's back as he spoke. "You and your mother said what you thought, and if the people enjoyed themselves, what signifies their driving me away."

I'll bet you ten to one they wouldn't enjoy themselves any the worse for that."

"What did you know of this?" asked Arnold, suddenly turning his flashing eyes upon Sissie.

"Mr. Preston told me of his intention some time ago, but he begged me not to mention it to you," answered Sissie, trying hard not to quail under Arnold's wrathful glance.

"Well, that is one comfort," Arnold said, more composedly. "*You* were not deceived. You know us as we really are—or nearly so."

"Bless the boy! What a fuss about nothing!" exclaimed Mr. Preston, somewhat recovering from his discomposure. "One would think we had been swindling our guests."

"It was a species of swindling," said Arnold, still reproachfully; but relenting as he caught sight of Mr. Preston's blank face,

he added, with a smile, "Promise not to play such tricks again," and as he spoke, he held out his hand, which his father grasped. "Do give up being ashamed of what you are. Miss Monk, has he any cause to be ashamed?"

"Certainly not."

"It isn't that, my boy. I ain't ashamed of myself—far from it. I am ashamed for you to have to call me 'father' before your swell friends; that's all I'm ashamed of."

"And is your opinion of me so mean that you cannot believe me when I say that I am proud to call you 'father?'"

"Bless your noble heart, my boy!" cried the elder man, beginning to whimper like a girl, and blowing his nose vigorously. "It makes *me* proud to hear you speak like that."

"This little family matter must be rather uninteresting to you ladies, I am afraid," said Arnold, now quite himself, and turning

with a smile to Miss Colquhoun and Sissie. "You see I am obliged occasionally to administer a reproof to this small man," and as he spoke he laid his hand affectionately on Mr. Preston's shoulder.

Directly after luncheon the chairs were brought, and the ladies were warmly packed into them, Mr. Preston and Sargentson acting as porters to Miss Colquhoun, Arnold and one of the Kirklands men to Sissie. The gentle, swaying movement over the soft, silent ground, was exceedingly enjoyable, and, with the view of the surrounding white landscape, gave Sissie a feeling of most unusual exhilaration. At Monk's Kirk Miss Colquhoun called a halt, that they might take a peep at the church decorators, and that the bearers might have some rest and refreshment.

A busy party was assembled in the church. Mr. Bligh and Mrs. Rupert Monk were superintending the hanging of green festoons

over the high arches of the nave. Miss Rice and Laura were intent upon the reading-desk. Lucy, with a still sad face and listless fingers, and little Lottie, full of animation and brightness, were being directed by Uncle Walter in the delicate ornamentation of the chancel. Sophie was decorating the pulpit, and Wilfred was assisting her, with the most entire ignorance of what was to be done, but with deft and willing fingers. The new comers were immediately called upon for advice and assistance. Mr. Preston was soon mounted on a ladder, to arrange some detail which the working-men who were employed could not understand, and which Mrs. Rupert would not allow her father to risk his neck in adjusting. Miss Colquhoun volunteered her help to Mrs. Boyd, who was working at the font with a tired and puzzled countenance. Sissie was also preparing to make herself of use, but found that her hands

were so cold that her gloves would not come off.

"There is a good fire in the vestry," suggested Arnold; "come and warm your hands there."

The vestry was unoccupied, and looked very warm and comfortable. Sissie sat down in front of the fire, whilst Arnold moved uneasily about.

"There is a great draught coming in from the church," he said at last, and shut the door. Then he came to the fire, and finding that Sissie had not yet succeeded in getting her gloves off, asked, in such a strangely trembling voice that Sissie thought he must be very cold, "May I try?" Sissie at once held up her hands. Arnold knelt down, and took them in both his. He gently drew off the gloves, and then continued to chafe the cold fingers for some time, without speaking. As he leant forward, Sissie was struck by the ghastly

pallor of his face, and came to the conclusion that the exertion of carrying her chair had been too much for his strength. As she was thinking thus, and was just going to propose that some other porter should be found for the rest of the journey, he looked suddenly into her face, and said, "I wonder whether you have the least idea how much I care for you!"

"Oh, Mr. Preston, don't!" cried Sissie, in a voice of great distress.

"Did I hurt you?" asked Arnold, startled.

"No—not that. I meant——"

"Not say that I care for you. Was that what you meant?" Arnold interrupted her hastily. "I must say it now. The deed is done. Sissie! I am not like many other men. I have never before even fancied myself in love. You are the first woman I ever saw whom I could love better than my mother."

"Don't say any more, Mr. Preston, pray

don't!" cried Sissie again, and the tears came into her eyes, and dropped upon the hands, now as cold as her own, which were holding hers. "I must have been very wrong to let it come to this. I never feared it till last night, but then, perhaps, I might have stopped it."

"Is it so disagreeable to you, then, to hear me speak so? Do you think me so very presumptuous?"

"No, not presumptuous at all, but—I am afraid you will think me a flirt."

"I shall never think that. It was all my own folly, I suppose, but I should not have dared to speak so soon, had not Stephen Rice implied that you were compromised by my attention, and that was worse than anything—even than risking such an answer as I have got."

"Oh, Mr. Preston, what can I say?"

"You cannot say anything if you do not like me," returned Arnold, in a voice of such

deep pathos that Sissie's tears flowed faster and faster. In her agitation she did not observe that the large drops fell on Arnold's hands, but he did, and stooping, passionately kissed them.

"I *do* like you," replied Sissie, as intelligibly as she could. "I like you better than any one I know—I think," she added, doubtfully; remembering that, before Edmund's illness, she had fancied that she could like Wilfred Bligh better than any one that she had ever known.

"You think?" repeated Arnold, wistfully

"No, I know—I know I like you better than any one else."

"But—oh, Sissie! do speak plainly! You mean only *like*—you do not love me."

"Yes, that is what I mean—at least I think so."

"You are not sure?" cried Arnold, with sudden hope. "Then let me try if I cannot make you love me."

"It would be of no use, I feel sure. I don't think I am like other girls. I don't think I know how to love—in that way."

"But you might learn how! Oh, Sissie! almost since the first day I saw you I have cared for nothing — thought of nothing but you! I know that this is no passing fancy. I feel that it has grown into my very life, and that only death will cure it. Give me some hope, Sissie! I will gladly be like Jacob; I will serve for you for fourteen years, and they would seem to me but a few days for the love that I have to you. Only give me a little hope."

Sissie had kept her eyes bent on the fire till now. But the heart-rending tones of that pleading voice were becoming more than she could bear, and she raised her head and looked into Arnold's face. There were Beppo's loving, faithful eyes again! Tearing her hands away, Sissie covered her face with them, and sobbed convulsively for a few

moments. Then composing herself, she again held out one of her hands to Arnold, and said, with a smile, "It shall be as you wish, Mr. Preston. I will try to like you as you wish."

"And I may see you as much as I like—I may do all I can to win you?" cried Arnold, joyfully.

"Yes; but I cannot promise that you will succeed. You must not think me a coquette if I never can say more than I do now."

"I shall never think you a coquette. You never could be a coquette."

"I don't think I could. I would not knowingly deceive you," returned Sissie.

"You never would! You could not do it! I would doubt my own senses, my own reason—everything in the world—sooner than I would doubt you."

"Thank you," said Sissie, simply, and then she tried to withdraw her hand from Arnold's clasp.

"One moment," he pleaded, in his persuasive tones. "Let me hold your hand a moment longer; let me fancy for one moment that I have a right to hold it; and then I will strive on for years, without asking for my reward till you choose to give it."

"And if I can never give it?" asked Sissie, mournfully.

Arnold turned very pale again, and a kind of shiver passed through him. "Well," he said, slowly, pressing his lips together, and looking steadily into Sissie's face, "even then the striving will have done me good. It is something to be allowed to love you. It is more than I had any right to hope for. There—I give it up," he added, releasing the hand which he had held.

"And now we must go back to the others," said Sissie, as she drew on her gloves. "We shall be benighted if we linger any longer on the road." She could not *now* propose a change of bearers.

As the pair passed out of the vestry door, and walked down the church, they had to encounter many curious and anxious glances. Lucy looked up from her work in the chancel with an expression of resigned sadness. Mr. Preston looked down from his work on the ladder with a chuckle of triumphant satisfaction. Sophie turned from Wilfred's earnest talk, to throw a gaze of curious and scornful inquiry after them ; and Miss Colquhoun met them at the church-door with a half-smile of earnest interest.

Mr. Preston soon joined the other three, and the party proceeded to Monk's Own. Arnold's love-making was at an end, even without the fear of being overheard by the other bearer. He now talked well and agreeably on various subjects, but carefully abstained from any personal allusions, and soon Sissie was as much at her ease with him as she had been before his confession.

The next day a great deal of the snow had

melted, and the road between Monk's Own and Monk's Kirk was practicable for carriages. After the morning service, the Monks went in, as usual, to the Rectory, to luncheon, and here they found Arnold and his father, and Stephen Rice, who immediately began to pay the most assiduous attention to Laura. Directly luncheon was over the Prestons left, and most of the other gentlemen accompanied them for the sake of the walk. Then Lucy, turning hastily to Sissie, said, "Come into my room for a few minutes, Sissie."

When the two girls were alone, neither of them spoke for some time, for Sissie saw plainly that Lucy had something important to say, and Lucy evidently did not know how to open the subject. At last she found voice, and began, "Tell me one thing, Sissie, if you do not very much mind. Did Arnold Preston propose to you yesterday?"

Then at once the cause of Lucy's sad and

pale face flashed upon Sissie. She knew that to inflict a short sharp pain would be kinder to her cousin than to spare the necessary wound, even if it had been possible for her to prevaricate; so she said quietly, turning to look out of the window as she spoke, "Yes, he did propose—or, at least, he told me that he liked me."

"And you are engaged?" asked Lucy, breathlessly.

"No; oh no! And no one must know what I have told you, Lucy."

"But I do not understand. Why are you not engaged?"

"I could not, Lucy; I do not care enough for him."

"Not care for him!"

"Did you think I did? Did I appear as if I did? Oh, I am so sorry!"

"No, I don't mean that, Sissie. I did not think about *you*. Only how could you help caring for him?"

"I like him very much ; but not as I must like my husband."

"And will you never marry him, then?"

"I do not know that. I have told him that I might some day get to like him."

"Then he means to persevere?"

"I think so. He says so."

"Of course he will, then. He always does what he says."

Seeing that the poor child did not really understand the nature of her own feelings for Arnold, Sissie hastened to change the subject, that there might be no chance of an explanation, and very soon left Lucy to herself. In the drawing-room she found Mrs. Rupert and Miss Colquhoun discussing the question of whether or no Wilfred was engaged to Sophie Rice, and how poor Walter would bear that inevitable termination to the rapidly increasing flirtation. Sissie, inspired by Arnold, had her own private opinion on the matter, but she did

not make it public, and soon walked across to the church, where Walter was to conduct the afternoon service.

As they left the church together, Walter asked, "Have you any idea what ails Lucy?"

"Why do you think anything ails her?"

"It is impossible to think otherwise. She is not the same girl she was three months ago. I cannot help fancying that Arnold Preston has something to do with it."

"Has he paid her any attention?" asked Sissie, rather hypocritically.

"I have never observed anything of the sort, and I once asked Lucy in some round-about way, and she assured me that nothing could have been more indifferent than his manner towards her had always been."

"Then, if you should be right in your suspicion, Uncle Walter, I think there is no doubt that Lucy will be quite herself again

as soon as he has gone away, as he must do soon."

Sissie proved a true prophet. No sooner had Arnold left for Oxford, than Lucy began to regain her usual colour and her usual spirits, and had soon so entirely forgotten her short-lived fancy, that Sissie felt almost indignant at such fickleness towards one with whom her own thoughts were every day more and more occupied.

END OF VOL. I.

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